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THE

COMPLETE WORKS

OF THE LATE

REV. PHILIP SKELTON,

RECTOR OF FINTONA, &c. &c.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

BURDY'S LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.

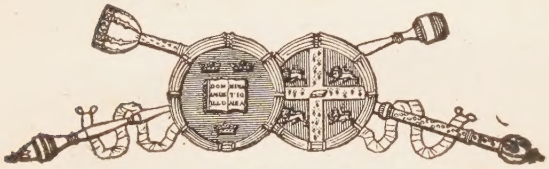
EDITED BY THE

REV. ROB$^{T.}$ LYNAM, A. M.

ASSISTANT CHAPLAIN TO THE MAGDALEN HOSPITAL.

IN SIX VOLUMES:

VOL. II.



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DISCOURSES,

CONTROVERSIAL AND PRACTICAL.

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CONTROVERSIAL DISCOURSES,

&c. &c.

DISCOURSE XVI.

FAITH WELL FOUNDED ON CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

ACTS x. 40, 41.

Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

To fill the character, and answer the purposes, of a mediator, it was judged necessary by Almighty God, that Christ should suffer death, and rise again from the dead, before he had seen corruption. His sufferings gave weight to his intercessions; and no other miracle could so strongly prove his mission, as his resurrection.

If the latter was a real resurrection, then the truth of Christianity is equal to its importance; but if it was not, if Christ did not come to life again after he was dead, then our religion was an imposture from the beginning, and we are deceived in adhering to it. 'If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith also is vain.'

The apostles, and the rest of Christ's disciples, after seeing all his other miracles, and working many themselves, rested their faith or disbelief on the experiment about to be made upon his dead body, in order to see whether the divine power would actually attend him in his grave. And the Jews, who had him now at the utmost disadvantage, when, as they thought, he could not make even an attempt to impose on them with an appearance of a resurrection, took all the proper precautions to prevent its being attempted by any body else. For this purpose they 'sealed his tomb,' which was in a rock, and 'set a guard of soldiers' to watch the entrance.

Impostures of all kinds are most easily passed upon the

world in ignorance and obscurity, and by surprise. They who carry them on, do it among the ignorant, and without giving sufficient warning beforehand of what they intend to do; lest the persons whom they would impose on, being prepared, should look sharp, and, by examining closely into every circumstance, should discover the deceit.

Far otherwise was the case in respect to the resurrection of Christ. It had been foretold many ages before, that 'God would not leave his Holy One,' the Messiah, 'in hell,' that is, the grave, 'nor suffer his flesh to see corruption:' and, when the time drew near in which this wonderful experiment was to be made, lest the persons concerned should not be sufficiently attentive, Christ took care to give both his friends and enemies timely warning of his intention to rise the third day after his death, that the latter might do their utmost to prevent it, and the former have the fullest evidence of the fact when done.

Now his enemies were persons of great understanding, and of malice, in regard to him, sufficient to put them upon doing every thing that could prevent the possibility of imposition. They had him entirely in their power; they took care to have more than sufficient proof of his death, before they suffered him to be taken from the cross; and although they permitted him to be buried in the tomb of a disciple, yet they kept that tomb absolutely in their power, and subject to their own inspection.

Taking it for granted, that Christ was, at least, a man of common sense (and his enemies allow him to have had a very extraordinary understanding), how can we account for his putting the divinity of his person, the credit of his mission, and the success of his religion in all ages, on so difficult a proof, nay, on a proof so impossible to be given, had he not known that infinite power was ready to give it? No one, who attempts to impose on others, gives warning long and often beforehand of what he intends to do.

Our Saviour, considered merely as a man of common sense, could not have proposed suffering death only to impose on others, especially as death must deprive him of all power to deceive, and of all advantages to be hoped for from the deceit.

As a man of common sense, he could not hope that the

Jews, who were his bitter enemies, and many ways interested to prevent his being taken for the Messiah, would let him slip out of their hands, till they had made sure work of his death.

As a man of common sense, he must have known, that, being once dead, if he could not raise himself again to life, his disciples would be as much interested to give him up, as his persecutors to destroy him, for an impostor; and that, even if they could have been, one and all of them, so mad as to assist in carrying on so fruitless a cheat in the teeth of a persecution already begun in the blood of their Master, they had neither resolution nor cunning sufficient for so difficult an enterprise; that, in short, they were almost as unable to carry on such a cheat successfully, as they were to give new life in reality to his body.

Supposing, then, that Christ knew himself to have no miraculous power more than other men, and that he was only a pretender, and a deceiver, he must have deliberately schemed his own misery, and untimely death. And for what? Not for even the wild hope of credit and success with the world after he was dead; for, having put the reality of his mission from God on his rising from death the third day, being sure to fail in this decisive proof, he must have schemed his own disgrace and infamy with all mankind; he must have courted misery and death, for no other end, but to make his memory scandalous and odious to all ages.

Surely none but an idiot could have taken such a course as this, when he might have put his credit and success upon a more promising footing; when he might have rested both on the miracles he was believed to have already wrought; when he might, as Mahomet did, have assumed the character, not of a sufferer, but of a conqueror, and that with infinitely more hope of gaining a powerful army to support him; because he could do things that looked so like miracles, that the wisest and most malicious of his enemies took them for such; and because the Jews were, at that very time, ready to rise in favour of any one who should attempt 'to restore the kingdom again to Israel.' A nation so numerous, so enthusiastic, and so obstinate, must have afforded the most hopeful prospect of success to the projected insurrection.

From this plain way of reasoning it follows, that we must either believe Christ knew he could raise himself from the

dead, or take him to have been the most weak and stupid of all men: yet, such must we be ourselves in the strongest sense of the words, if we do not look upon his understanding as superior to that of other men; for, in all parts of his conduct, he discovered surprising gravity and wisdom; and, as a speaker, could please without ornament, could do what he would with the head and heart of his hearer, without logic or rhetoric, without the least assistance of art. Or, if we will suppose all this the effect of superior art; yet we cannot do so, without allowing him superior understanding. And could such a man deliberately set himself in such a course of life as must be miserable, and soon end in a shocking death, merely to prove, by a resurrection which he promised, but knew he could by no means perform, that he was the Son and messenger of God, in order to be adored after he was dead, when he could not possibly avoid foreseeing, that, by this very expedient, he should prove himself to have been a most impudent and scandalous impostor? It shocks common sense to suppose this; and therefore we must conclude, that Christ, in promising to return again to life the third day, did no more than he well knew he could easily perform; and farther, if we have good reason to believe he did actually rise again to life, we must ourselves be something less than men, if we do not take him to have been more, to have been the Son and messenger of God, the instructor and saviour of men.

As to the proofs and evidences of his having risen from the dead, they are such as never appeared to vouch any other fact. His disciples, who in a manner gave him up upon his being put to death, having been eye-witnesses of his resurrection; having over and over again seen him alive after he was dead; having conversed with him, eat with him, felt him, for forty days successively; became the witnesses of his resurrection; and rejoiced to prove its reality, and their own veracity, to the world, by all the sufferings and variety of deaths that human nature is most apt to fear and decline, rather than give up a cause in which they saw the honour of God, and the salvation of men, were so immediately concerned. They had every worldly advantage to hope for, if they betrayed this cause; they had every worldly evil to encounter with, if they stood to it; yet every man of

them did stand to it to the last, which is a thing utterly inconceivable, upon a supposition that they were cheats; for such always seek to impose on others, not themselves, and never fail, in cases like this, to detect and betray one another. Their Master had been crucified, their friend and fellow-disciple stoned to death in their sight, and the spirit of persecution was growing warmer and warmer both in the Jews and Romans; yet not one of them ever entertained a single thought of deserting the cause they had espoused. Now let common sense judge whether this is not, morally speaking, an impossibility, supposing them to have known their Master to be an impostor, and his resurrection a figment.

To all this there is but one objection that seems to deserve our consideration. The adversaries of Christianity ask, Why did not Christ appear, after his resurrection, to the unbelieving Jews, particularly to the high-priest and sanhedrim? Why were his own disciples singled out to be his witnesses, and not his enemies, whose conviction must have weighed more with posterity than that of his disciples, who were ignorant, prejudiced in his favour, and persons of too little importance or esteem to evidence so great and so extraordinary a fact?

In answer to this, it must be observed, that the enemies of Christ, and the unbelieving Jews, had abundant evidence of his mission and resurrection. As to his mission, they saw him do and suffer all the prophecies had foretold of him. And, as to his resurrection, what farther evidence did they want of that, than was actually given them? Did he not tell them, he would rise again the third day? Had they not his person in their power? Did they not pursue him till it was impossible to doubt of his death; and use the most unsurmountable precautions to prevent the stealing away his body? And when, nevertheless, they had not his body to produce, how could they question the reality of his resurrection? They had, in short, evidence of this great event, sufficient for their own conviction, had they not been the most blind and perverse of mankind. All farther evidence must have been thrown away on such men, both in respect to their conviction, and that of others through them.

As to the attestation of this fact to the world, it required

two qualifications in the witnesses, knowledge and integrity. In both respects, the disciples of our Lord were the fittest witnesses. They could see, hear, feel, as well as men of higher note, and greater learning. They had received the instructions, and seen the other miracles, of their Master, which were to be attested as well as this. When one was to be elected into the place of Judas, this was the qualification judged necessary to the candidate: 'Of these men,' saith St. Peter, 'that have accompanied with us, all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.' This apostle, in like manner, shews elsewhere the propriety of the same qualification: 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree. Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly, not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.'

The disciples of Christ were also infinitely better fitted, in point of integrity, than his adversaries, to attest his resurrection. One artless honest witness, staking his life on his testimony, was more capable of evidencing such a fact, than a hundred cunning, designing, and wordly-minded men could be. No instance of folly and madness could equal that of Christ, in putting the proof of his mission on his resurrection, in case he had not been sure he should rise again; excepting that of his disciples, in attesting this resurrection, supposing the fact to have been in their judgment at all doubtful. But such was the nature of the fact, that it was impossible they should have any doubt concerning it. They must have had the highest certainty, either that their Master did, or did not, rise again. If they knew he did not, what was the nature and end of their evidence? Why, its nature consisted in evidencing a lie; and its end was misery and death, to be suffered for a known impostor. This proves beyond all question, that their evidence was the evi-

dence of honest men. We believe two witnesses, on their oaths; but would not the testimony of one sober and rational man, on his blood, weigh more with us than a hundred oaths?

Had our Saviour appeared to the unbelieving Jews after he rose from the dead, it must have been either in order to their conversion, or, through their conviction, to the higher attestation of his resurrection.

As to their conversion, which would have been an act of grace and mercy from God, Christ did not appear to them, because they were excluded from this favour already by their own pride, obstinacy, and malice; and by the just curse of God, whose Son had already pronounced them guilty of the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, for ascribing his other miracles to the power of the devil. Besides, they who were so blinded as not to be convinced by the former miracles, or so ill-hearted as to stifle their conviction, and persecute to death the worker of them, had Christ appeared to them after his death, would have ascribed this miracle also to Beelzebub. Undoubtedly they would have attempted to crucify him afresh; in which case, he must either have suffered a second death, which was contrary to all reason, or vanished out of their hands, which would have given them an occasion to say, they saw nothing but a phantom or apparition, and to call that phantom an evil spirit. In sober earnest, did such men as these deserve higher means of faith than we do? Or was it a fit thing, that they should be forced to believe? It is true, our Saviour appeared, after his resurrection, to St. Paul, at that time his bitterest enemy; and, by so doing, forced his faith. But here the case was quite different. St. Paul opposed Christianity, like an honest man, from a strong persuasion, that it was an imposture; and as, in this, he acted sincerely, according to his conscience, and could not be converted without a special miracle, our blessed Lord vouchsafed it to him, not so much for his own sake, as to make him a glorious instrument for the conversion of thousands.

As St. Paul acted an upright part before his conversion, he was a fit person to be employed in the service of the good cause he had opposed; and accordingly, when his conscience

became Christian, it was, to the full, as warm and active as formerly, when it was altogether Jewish.

But was this to have been expected from the high-priest, the members of the sanhedrim, or the Pharisees, those masters of dissimulation, those monsters of cruelty, those worldly-minded wretches, whose consciences lay in their hearts, and whose hearts were wholly given up to wealth and ambition? No; such persons were very unfit to become martyrs to a self-denying religion, which they had already engaged against by an act of murder. From men of this stamp nothing was to be expected but a flat denial of what they had seen, in case Christ had appeared to them. This would have put the evidence for the resurrection on a more doubtful footing, than trusting it to the disciples alone did. Besides, a truth may be evaded, and the belief of it enfeebled, by explaining it away, and giving it a suspicious turn, much better than by a flat denial. For example; in the present case, had Christ appeared to the high-priest and Pharisees, they might, and probably would have said, they saw something that looked like him, in their opinion, either an empty delusion, or some one who resembled Christ in his person and countenance a little; but that it could not have been he, because, when they went to lay hands on him, he fled, or vanished out of their sight: for one of the two he must have done, or else suffered himself to be seized, and treated as before. Besides, many of them did not so much as know his face; and others that did, would probably have dissembled ignorance thereof.

But that we may not only, by probable conjectures, suppose what these men would have done had Christ appeared to them after his resurrection, we have a full proof in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, which demonstrates what I have been saying. Although they knew the prophets had foretold the resurrection of the Messiah; although they knew Christ had fulfilled all the other prophecies concerning the Messiah; although they were sensible he had wrought such miracles as were alone sufficient to prove his mission from God; yet when the soldiers who had been set to guard his tomb, and who had been terrified, while on their duty, with the earthquake, and the vision of an angel, had given

them a full account of all the things that were done in relation to the fact of his resurrection; instead of being made proselytes by this extraordinary evidence, or being led thereby to inquire farther into the matter, 'they bribed the soldiers to say his disciples had stolen him away while they slept.' Now let any man of common sense tell us whether these men were either deserving of higher proof than they had already received, or capable of receiving it; whether they were either likely to have been made witnesses of the fact, had Christ shewn himself to them after his resurrection; or, in case they had been gained, whether they had been fit witnesses to attest such a truth? Would they have gone about through the world to preach Christ? Would they have forsaken all their pomp and wealth, to follow a persecuted cause? Would they have sealed their testimony with their blood? No; this cause required honest and faithful witnesses; but these men were altogether false and treacherous. This cause required witnesses who were 'zealous of good works,' and willing to suffer the utmost severities for it; but these men were more disposed to exercise the most inhuman cruelties for a bad cause, than to suffer the least inconveniency or loss for the best cause in the world.

Had Christ appeared to these men, either they would have continued in their unbelief, which would have greatly hurt the cause of Christianity, because it would have furnished such as had an aversion to the faith of a Christian with a pretence to say, his appearances satisfied none but his own ignorant and bigoted disciples; or they would have suffered themselves to be convinced, and have declared for Christianity. Now it is a question worth considering, whether this, which was the best that could have been expected, would have served the cause of Christianity, or not. For my part, I am clear in it, that it would have done infinite mischief to it. Had these men, together with Pontius Pilate, and the Romans who were on the spot, become evidences for the resurrection, either they must have converted all the rest of the Jews and Romans, or only some of them. Had they converted them all, we, in these later ages, would have suspected the whole of Christianity as a political contrivance, cooked up and vouched for by these artful statesmen, to take the place of Paganism, which was then losing

its credit with the world, in order to keep the populace in awe. Besides, in this case, the grand evidence for Christianity, which arose from the martyrdoms of its first preachers, had been wanting; for, if all had been Christians, as there had been none to persecute, so there had been none to suffer.

But if these great persons, becoming witnesses for the resurrection, had only brought over to Christianity some of their contemporary Jews and Romans, then nothing had been done by their attestation but what was done without it; and sure I am, that, had the unbelieving Jews and Romans put them to the test of martyrdom, they would have shamefully deserted and betrayed the truth, through their excessive fondness for life, together with the grandeur and pleasures of this world. This, humanly speaking, would have wholly ruined Christianity. For men at first professing it, afterward to renounce it, nay, to declare it an imposture (which, to satisfy their persecutors and save their lives, they must have done), had been enough to render ridiculous the martyrdom of lower, but honester witnesses, who continued to profess it in flames. As these men had already bought our Saviour, so we may be sure they would have sold him, as soon as their own lives became the price of his discredit.

From hence, and from a great deal more that might be said on the same subject, it appears, that Christ judged infinitely better in not appearing after his resurrection to those who crucified him, than the short-sighted unbelievers, who make this an objection to the truth of his resurrection.

This only objection of weight being thus removed, and the evidence given to the resurrection of Christ being proved irresistible, it is scarcely in our power to suspect the fact.

It is true, the strangeness of that fact is apt to stagger the faith of such as measure credibility only by what is common, or frequently brought under their own observation. Such people should consider, that the resurrection is said to be the work of God; that 'all his works are marvellous, though in wisdom he hath made them all;' nay, that his works which we see every moment, such as the light, the motion of bodies, the growth of plants, the production of animals, are all infinitely more wonderful in themselves than the resurrection

of Christ, or any other man. Nay, all that we see and know of God's works, great and excellent as they are, is not more necessary to the belief of his wisdom and goodness, than the resurrection of Christ.

Indeed, if Christ did not rise, Christianity is altogether an imposture; so is Judaism; and, consequently, as no other species of religion hath the least shadow or mark of a divine original, it follows, that God never made any revelation to mankind; that is, that although he made it impossible for mankind to subsist without religion, or to be happy without the true religion, yet he never afforded them the means of attaining to it.

To evade the imputation of this blasphemous conclusion, our modern infidels say, God hath given to all men sufficient means of knowing the true religion by the mere light of nature, although no mortal should ever talk one word to them about it, or teach them a tittle of it. This most extravagant assertion, which the continual experience of every mortal fully refutes, is all that infidelity or Deism hath to build on.

But let this pass; and let us, who firmly believe in the resurrection of our blessed Saviour, consider it as the first fruits of a universal resurrection, since it is so set forth to us in holy Scripture. Let us continually reflect, that 'God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by his Son Christ Jesus, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him up from the dead.' Let us consider, that, as sure as Christ is risen, as sure as man is a free and accountable creature, as sure as God is a just governor of the world, and an infallible performer both of what he promises and threatens; so surely shall we all arise from the earth, and, 'standing before the judgment-seat of God, shall receive the full reward of that which we have done in the flesh, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.' That infinitely wise and powerful Being, who hath weighed every thing in a balance, who hath given proportion, beauty, convenience, and order, to all the works of nature, will most assuredly, at his own appointed time, put the moral world also into the balance, and assign the righteous and the wicked their respective stations, as well as the water and the fire. The material elements lay at first in a frightful confusion,

till by the operation of divine wisdom and power, they fell into their proper places; so that, in their present state, they do infinite honour to the great Artificer of nature. In like manner, the moral world, which is by far the more excellent part of the creation, although it now lies in confusion, good and evil being intermixed, and the righteous and wicked perpetually interfering, shall be reduced to order; insomuch that the good and the bad shall no longer contend for superiority, nor shake God's kingdom with trials or convulsions. When the day appointed for judgment shall arrive, 'the righteous shall have dominion over the wicked in the very morning' of that day; and shall have power to compel them, although against their wills, to obey and answer the purposes of Providence. To suppose the contrary; to believe that accountable beings shall never be called to account, and that the moral or intellectual world shall never be cleared up and regulated; would reflect more dishonour on God, and argue greater weakness in our reason, than the supposition of endless confusion in the material world. To preserve the heavenly bodies in their courses; to confine the elements to their stations; to promote the birth, and ensure the being, of the vegetable and animal species; are not as necessarily the effects of God's wisdom, goodness, and power, as to relieve the virtuous from their distresses, and crown them with eternal peace and joy; as to put an end to the insolence of the vicious, and make them everlasting examples of divine justice. The faith of the good man may be sometimes so staggered with his afflictions, and that of the wicked so lost in his successes and triumphs, as to suppress the fears of the one, and cloud the hopes of the other; but he who at present guides the year, and brings round the seasons, without even a momentary variation, is, with the same steady and irresistible hand, leading us all to the seat of judgment, making the necessary dispositions, and ripening the course of things for the proper season marked out, in his unalterable decree, for the great event. Howsoever vice may feed itself up with false reasonings, or amuse itself with sensual pleasures, or lull itself in stupidity and security, yet it is as certain as that we are now alive and shall soon die, that, after death, we shall arise from the grave, and be judged in the flesh for what we have done in the flesh.

Since, then, God cannot be wise, nor good, nor just, nor powerful, if we be not judged; since the only religion that hath any right to the title of truth hath given us strong and repeated assurances of a judgment to come; 'what manner of persons ought we to be, in all godliness and true holiness!' This is an event we cannot possibly shun, and ought therefore continually to apprehend. What are the things of this world, that they should turn our eyes aside from that awful throne, from whence we are to be either carried to the eternal enjoyment of God, or sent away to the endless torture of fire! What are the pleasures and honours of this life, when compared with the joys and glories of heaven! What are the sufferings of the righteous here, when set against the miseries of the damned hereafter! What is reason, if she cannot apprehend a difference that is so immensely wide! And what is the will or heart of man, if, when his reason rightly apprehends the difference, it cannot be brought to submit itself to reason, and act accordingly!

But as our hearts are indeed 'very deceitful, and desperately wicked,' insomuch that reason can by no means govern them, let us, in the spirit of deep contrition and fear, smite upon our breasts, and cry aloud to God for the assistance of his Holy Spirit, that he may enliven our faith, and, through that only instrument of salvation, strike upon our insensible hearts such an impression of God's final judgments, as cannot be resisted, nor for a moment suspended; that we may so conduct our lives, as if the whole of them were to be passed at the very footstool of God's throne, and we saw him entering every thought, word, and action, in the great book of our account, so shall we please and honour him here, and he shall bless and make us happy hereafter.

Grant this, we most humbly and earnestly beseech thee, O Fountain of all good, for the sake of Christ Jesus, our dear Redeemer; to whom, with thee, and the Holy Ghost, one glorious and eternal Trinity, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XVII.

JUDAS A PREACHER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

ADVERTISEMENT.

The argument in favour of Christ and his miracles, drawn from the history of Judas, and here beat out, was briefly sketched in the fifth dialogue of Deism Revealed, and, some years afterward, enlarged on in a pamphlet published in Scotland, which the author of these sermons did not see, till a good many years after this discourse was written and preached. From hence it may be with probability inferred, that the reasonings here urged are conclusive, as they have had considerable weight with others, as well as with the author, Basnage having touched on it long ago.

St. Mark xiv. 43—45.

And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords, from the chief-priests and the scribes and the elders.

And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely.

And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, Master; and kissed him.

I have not chosen these words to be the subject of an invective on the baseness of that man who hath outdone all other traitors in villany, and hath made the name of Judas, to all succeeding generations, as strong an expression for ingratitude and falsehood, as that of the devil himself; but from this passage I shall take an occasion to try, whether the whole of his history, as set forth here, and elsewhere in Scripture, doth not furnish us with a good argument in favour of the Master he betrayed, and the religion he deserted.

If, on the one hand, the great facts of our Saviour's history are fully proved to be true by the readiness of his first witnesses to brave the fury of persecution in its utmost cruelties, rather than to give up the truth of those facts, or even to stifle it in silence; an argument as strong, on the other, for the reality of his miracles, and the purity of his whole

life, may be brought from the spirit and conduct of those who persecuted him, as also of the wretch who betrayed him.

The chief-priests, the scribes, and elders of the Jews, despised him for the meanness of his parentage, and lowness of the character he appeared in. They hated him for the freedom of his reproofs. They envied him for the superiority of his wisdom. They persecuted him, because they could not refute him. They ascribed his miracles, which they could not deny, to the devil. They purchased evidence against him; and, when that evidence proved insufficient, they helped it out with factious clamours, and a popular demand for his blood. They bought off the soldiers, who otherwise would have been witnesses of his resurrection. And, as his disciples were poor and needy men, the money of these wealthy enemies was always ready for such of his followers as would betray him.

These things considered, we may reasonably presume such adversaries would leave no methods untried to destroy him, or throw discredit on the work he had in hand. Nor are we to wonder, if among so many necessitous followers of Christ, one was found, who was base enough to prefer their money to the service of a Master so often in distress for the necessaries of life.

If this traitor was capable of selling the liberty of his Master, and betraying his person into the hands of his most virulent enemies, we may be sure he would have made no scruple to expose the artifice of his preachings, or to detect the deceit of his miracles, had there been any thing dark or fraudulent in either. In the first place, this would have better served the purposes of the Jewish rulers, than any thing that could have been done to Christ's person; for this would have ruined his cause, and suppressed his religion, the propagation of which, did not depend, as the event fully proved, on the liberty or life of Christ. What was the life of Christ, considered in itself, to the Jews, more than that of another man? Or had they any other reason for desiring his death, but that they might by that means stop the progress of his religion, by destroying its author, and intimidating his disciples? Judas, therefore, could by no means have

merited so great a reward from them, as by proving his Master to be an impostor, and furnishing them with materials whereby they might expose his miracles to the contempt, his doctrines to the suspicion, and his name, of consequence, to the abhorrence of mankind.

In the next place, This was what Judas would have much rather chosen to have done, because this would have given him the character of a friend to truth, not a traitor; and would have really been the action of an honest man, rather than of a villain. It would have been no fault in him to follow Jesus, while he thought him the Messiah; and, when he found him to be a cheat, it would have been a virtue to expose his practices, and to prevent the credulity of the world from being abused by falsehood instead of truth, and legerdemain instead of miracles. Besides, if we may judge by his conduct, we cannot help concluding, that, next to the enriching himself, his grand aim was to assist the chief-priests and elders in stifling the new sect and religion of his Master: but by no means to take away the life of that Master.

How the thoughts of Judas wrought from the time that Satan entered into him, and put him upon consulting with the enemies of Christ, he who tempted him to so foul a treachery may best explain; or they, who have hearts like his own, may guess; but it is pretty clear from his conduct, that he rather intended to strike at his Master's credit and liberty, than his life; for, when he saw how things were going, and that Christ was condemned, he repented of what he had done, returned the money, and destroyed himself, either by hanging himself, as the word in St. Matthew is translated, or rather, as Dr. Hammond expounds it, by giving himself up to an outrageous fit of despair, that strangled, and tore him to pieces. Be this as it will, it is plain the effects of his treachery had taken a turn he by no means expected, or indeed had any reason to expect; for he knew nothing could be laid to his Master's charge, which either the Jewish or Roman laws had made capital; he knew the Jews, who alone were his enemies, had no power at that time to put any man to death; and he thought it highly improbable, that the Roman equity would take away the life

of a man who could be accused of nothing but what related to the religion of the Jews, which the Romans laughed at, as a matter altogether superstitious and trifling.

From hence it appears, as clearly as any thing can do, that Judas, in betraying his Master, had no design to assist the Jews in the murder of that Master. What, then, was his design? Why, it was to get money for gratifying the Jews, by putting Christ into their hands, in order, at most, to stop the progress of his religion by the imprisonment, banishment, or disgrace, of its author. Something he must do, to earn the money he coveted; and this seemed more agreeable to his nature, which was treacherous, not bloody, than any other service he could do.

But if, notwithstanding all that hath been said, it is still insisted, that he must, all along, have had the death of his Master in view, inasmuch as he could have expected nothing less from the implacable spirit of the Jews, and the iniquity of the judge; it will follow, that Judas could have had no thoughts of sparing the practices of his Master, since he had no tenderness for his life. If he could resolve to spill the blood of one who had treated him, and every body else, with a mildness and sweetness exceeding those of all other men, he could not, surely, think of concealing the disingenuous artifices, or screening the pretended miracles, of a man whose life he hunted with the heart of a blood-hound.

In whichever light we take his conduct, he must have been ready to do all the mischief in his power to the religion from which he had apostatized. Now, could he have shewn the miracles of Christ to have been wrought by magic, or the power of natural causes, or to be no miracles, but mere tricks or deceits; or could he have proved his Master, from any thing in the secret instructions he gave his disciples, or from any thing in his private life or conversation, to be a bad man, and an impostor; these proofs, put into the hands of the Jewish rulers, must have enabled them all at once to throw contempt on the apostles, and to ruin the religion they preached.

It is now time to observe, that, had Christ been only a mere man, or any thing less than what he gave himself out for, the Messiah, and the Son of God, he must have been an impostor; and Judas must have known it, and been able

to prove it. It is certain Christ took on him the prophetic character and style of the Messiah, and called himself the Son of God. In this light he set himself not only in private to his own disciples, but publicly to the unbelieving Jews, who attempted to stone him for so doing. It is certain also, that he every day did such things as convinced numbers that the power of God was with him; and forced those who hated him to own, performances of that kind could not be effected by virtue of mere natural causes. These things he did so often, and so openly, and appealed so confidently to them, as proofs of his divine mission, that his disciples, who saw them all, must have examined them with all the attention and sagacity they were masters of; and, that they were not ready to swallow every juggling trick for a miracle, is plain from their unaccountable doubts, and strange incredulity. If, on the one side, such miracles were exceedingly convincing, it was, on the other, no easy matter to believe, that a man, subject to hunger, thirst, and other human infirmities, was the Son of God; or that, if he was, he should suffer himself to be put to death; and that being dead, he should rise again to life the third day, and ascend openly into heaven. Before they could believe things so incredible on the strength of miracles, those miracles must have been closely attended to, and severely scanned. Had they been found to have any deceit or management in them, they must have proved him who wrought them to be a cheat, and, considering the little worldly advantage, or rather the danger, there was in following him, the detection of any one pretended miracle must have ruined his credit with his disciples, and banished them all from about him. Had Judas, in particular, found out any thing of this sort, he would probably have taken an earlier opportunity of making his fortune by accusing such a Master; at least, one so little subject to scruples would not, after he had done the thing, have suffered so violent a remorse.

But what puts this matter out of all dispute, and fully demonstrates, that, had Christ been an impostor as to his miracles, Judas must have known it, is, that Judas was not only an eye-witness of the miracles Christ wrought, or pretended to work, but did, by virtue of the powers conferred on him by Christ, work miracles himself. He was sent out

with the rest of the twelve; and we have this account of the joint commission, in which the twelve are all set down by name, beginning with Simon Peter and ending with Judas Iscariot: 'And when Christ had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease. These twelve Jesus sent forth, and said, As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give;' Matt. x. Pursuant to this most extraordinary commission, 'they departed and went through the towns, preaching the Gospel, and healing every where;' Luke ix.

On this transaction we may make two reflections, extremely to our present purpose. First, If Jesus had not been perfectly sure he could communicate the aforesaid power in the free and ample manner in which his disciples were commanded to use it, he must have been lost to common sense, and all his own designs, to send them out on such an errand; for in case they should fail of success in their attempts to heal the sick, or raise the dead, the whole world must have treated them as villains or madmen; nor could they help bestowing the like appellations on their Master; which must have been attended with the immediate disappointment of all his schemes. Surely no impostor in the world ever acted such a part as this; nor is it in the wit of man to contrive a more certain method of ruining his own credit, and proving himself a cheat to all mankind.

In the second place, If the disciples, having tried the virtue of their commission, found they could work none of those miracles which their Master had ordered them to work, had not Judas, then, wherewithal sufficiently to instruct the chief-priests and elders how to baffle all his Master's pretences to a miraculous power? Could he not at any time appear as a witness to prove his Master had attempted to communicate that power, and failed? And would not this have shewn, either that his Master had in reality no such power, or that, if he had, it was not to his credit to impart the secret of it even to his greatest confidants? But, if we take the thing in another light, and suppose they did, in some manner or other, do things somewhat like those they were com-

manded, by virtue of some magical spells, or of some extraordinary natural secrets bestowed on them by their Master; when Judas went to sell his Master, would he have failed to give an account of these secrets to the Jewish grandees, who would have paid him handsomely, no doubt, for the curious and useful information? Or can we suppose they did receive such information, but, through carelessness, neglected to publish and apply it to that important purpose of loading the new religion with infamy, which it would so effectually have served, and which they were above all things so desirous of doing?

Again; had Christ been addicted to sensual pleasure; had he covetously aimed at amassing riches, or ambitiously at raising himself to the temporal throne of David; or had he been in any respect a bad man; Judas, after so long an acquaintance, must have known it, and might have helped the Jewish rulers to set these secret immoralities in so strong an opposition to his repeated precepts for mortification, and for contempt of worldly power and wealth, as could not have failed to paint him, in the eyes of all men, the vilest hypocrite and deceiver. If, after all Christ said concerning the necessity of denying ourselves, and taking up the cross, Judas could have proved him a slave to drunkenness, gluttony, or lewdness; if, after Christ had forbid his disciples to 'lay up for themselves treasures upon earth,' Judas could have discovered his secret hoards of riches; or if, after Christ had declared 'his kingdom was not of this world,' Judas could have made it appear, although barely on his own testimony, that his Master had been taking steps to arrive at the sovereignty, and, in order to engage a sufficient number of followers, had promised to raise the chief men of his party to the highest places of honour and profit; why did he not appear, and evidence these things at the trial of his late Master, where they would have done his business effectually before the Roman governor, and where there was so great a want of evidence, that he must infallibly have escaped, had not the whole power of the Jewish nation strained its interest to have him condemned?

Instead of all this, the unhappy Judas, overwhelmed with grief and remorse, confesses, at the approach of death, when truth is wont to be uppermost, that he had sinned, in that

he had betrayed the innocent blood. And did Judas, the very traitor who brought him to the cross, with his dying breath pronounce him innocent? Could not even he that betrayed him, accuse him? Or, after betraying him, can we suppose he would scruple to accuse him, had he known any crime with which he could have charged him? Had he known any thing of this nature, surely it must have prevented so shocking a repentance; surely he could never have taken it into his head to punish himself in so horrid a manner for bringing a known impostor to justice, much less would he have declared him innocent.

Now it must be observed here, that, if Judas thought him innocent, he must, on the strength of all the foregoing reasonings, have been actually innocent. His miracles must have been real miracles; his wise precepts, and excellent exhortations, must have come from his heart; his whole behaviour must have been a strict and close exemplification of his doctrines; his preachings must have been the voice, and he himself, the Son of God.

We are told in the gospel, that Christ, before he was taken, intimated to his apostles, even to Judas himself, that he should betray him. There is all the reason in the world for considering this as a real prophecy, and, consequently, for looking on Christ as divinely commissioned. But if we take it only for a probable guess, or an assurance founded on somewhat Christ had discovered of the traitor's secret designs; and if, in like manner, we consider Christ as no prophet at all; we must allow there could be no reason why he should both retain Judas in his service, and yet at the same time reserve the secrets and stratagems, on which he planned his imposture, from him alone of all his disciples. Taking Christ, in all respects, to be no more than a common man, had he, as one man does another, found out Judas to be of a false and fickle disposition, he would that moment have dismissed him, or, rather, had him privately put out of the way. But, if he did not find him out to be such a man till just before he was betrayed, he must have communicated all his secrets to him with the same confidence as to the rest, when he had the same opinion of him that he had of the other eleven.

Now, if I mistake not, it hath been already made to

common sense an evident truth, that Judas would have accused his Master of imposture, if he could. But that he did not, is as undeniable a truth; for, in case he had, the enemies of Christ would have urged that imposture at his trial against him, and afterward against his religion; and must, with such a key, have easily detected all the pretended miracles of the apostles, and, by that means, have rendered abortive the infant religion they maintained. Had they been able to bring so thorough a refutation against the Author and preachers of Christianity, we cannot doubt they would have done it; not that, in doing it, they must have stifled our religion in its birth. This duly considered, the ground Christianity gained immediately after the crucifixion of its Author, in spite of the most bloody persecutions, which was all the enemy could then employ against it, and doth still maintain, in opposition to all the vices and sophistry of mankind, which is all he can now combat it with, is a full and irresistible proof, that Christ was the Son of God, and his religion a divine revelation.

The minds of men according to their make, are apt to be variously affected with different arguments, though in themselves perhaps nearly equal, and though applied to the same purpose. But, of all the arguments in favour of Christianity, none strikes me with greater force than this, drawn from the history of Judas; especially when I consider, that the Jewish priests and rabbis might, on looking into the prophecies, so easily have seen, that the Messiah must have come at the time Christ appeared, and must have been sold, betrayed, and put to death, precisely at the time, and in the manner, he was. That these wise and learned men should, directly against their own intention, have been, by their plotting and bribing for his destruction, the chief instruments to prove Christ the Messiah, hath something in it very astonishing; something that cannot be rationally traced up to any other cause, but that overruling Providence which dictated the prophecies, and was concerned to see them fulfilled. Had not king Herod, and Pontius Pilate, 'with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, taken counsel together against the Lord, and against his Christ;' and had he not been sold to them exactly for thirty pieces of silver; the prophecies of David and Zechary must have been false. Since, by their

own computation, the time must have been at hand, when, according to Daniel, 'the Prince must be cut off,' how could they avoid, either when they were consulting about his death, or when they were telling out the pieces to Judas; how, I say, could they avoid reflecting on the qualities of the metal, or the number of the pieces? Had they paid him in gold, or given him one piece more or less, they might have afterward proved Jesus not to be the Messiah. Had not Judas been an apostle and bishop, Jesus could not have been the Messiah; for the prophecy of David, in Psalm cix, where speaking of the traitor, he says, 'Let his days be few, and let another take his bishoprick,' could not have been verified, as it was by his disastrous death, and the election of Matthias into his place. Let infidelity behold, and be amazed (for it cannot be convinced), when it finds the Jewish rulers chaffering and cheapening with Judas about the blood of his Master, and at length, contrary to the treacherous intention of his heart, and the malicious designs of theirs, unwittingly agreeing on the single scheme that could fulfil the prophecies, and prove, beyond question, what they were that instant labouring to disprove, that Christ was actually the Messiah; that the wonders he wrought were true and genuine miracles; and that the religion he preached was the very will and word of God.

But, I foresee, an infidel will be ready enough to object here, that the story about Judas tells ill, and seems improbable, alleging, that if Judas had known his Master to be an impostor, his conscience could never have thrown him into such deadly agonies for having brought him to the cross; and that, if he had not only seen Christ work so many miracles, but also wrought some himself in the name, and by the power of Christ, it had been impossible for him to turn either apostate or traitor.

If historical facts, so very possible, and so well vouched as this, may be refuted by surmises, then it will be unsafe to build any thing on the accounts of former times. But, that the objector may not think this altogether so extraordinary a phenomenon in a very depraved mind, let him strictly examine his past life, and perhaps he may recollect his having acted, on some occasions, directly against the convictions of reason, and the admonitions of conscience,

when, as in the case of Judas, the prospect of some worldly advantage, or the dread of some very threatening evil, or both at once, have, for the time, proved too strong for all his prudence and principles. This is no uncommon case; although I shall readily own, that it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to find a case so hard to be reconciled to reason as that of Judas; which, considering what he had formerly seen Christ do, and what he had done himself, may require a mind as irregular and black as his own to account for. It may be, a man, whose mind was so untowardly turned as his, might have doubted whether the miracles he wrought himself were the effects of a good or evil power. We have too much reason to think there are men, who, from the inveterate habits and violent motions of a bad heart, are capable of acting against the clearest convictions a bad head can receive. Besides, I believe we should not be far from the truth, if we should say conviction is never perfect, I mean in matters of morality or religion, if the heart does not second it. It is, however, after all, by no means so strange, that a very ill-minded man, like him, should fall, as that the better disciples of our Saviour should stagger in the faith, as we find they were inclined to do, after all they had seen and done, upon their Saviour's crucifixion. If so honest a man, and so zealous a servant, as Peter, could, through fear, forswear his Master, notwithstanding the reasons for his faith were so strong; we are not to be surprised, that such a monster as Judas should, in spite of the like reasons for his faith, through covetousness, sell the same Master.

If parallel instances from Scripture might be allowed on this occasion, we might serve ourselves with several. Simon Magus saw the miracles wrought by Peter and John at Samaria; but, instead of becoming by that means a true and real Christian, he would have purchased the same power with money, in order to make ten times the sum by it, and to get himself the name of something more than man. Was not Balaam a real prophet? And yet was he not a very bad man? Did he not give advice to the enemies of the Israelites, advice the most dangerous and pernicious to that people, whom God, by a very extraordinary revelation, had taught him to distinguish from all others, as his peculiar people? Wholesome food turns to corruption on a vitiated stomach;

and truth itself to intellectual poison, in a depraved and wicked mind. But why should we seek to account for this difficulty by other means, since the gospel itself clears up the point? Judas was in himself a dishonest and bad man. When Mary, in the zeal of her heart, had anointed the feet of Jesus with the precious ointment, and wiped them with her hair; Judas said, in the hypocrisy of his, 'Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? But this he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.' Yet, thief and hypocrite as he was, it is probable his own unassisted wickedness might not have carried him to such an height of villany, as to betray his Master, had not Satan, immediately on his receiving the sop, entered into him, and added all the wickedness of a devil to his own. Satan, who from an angel became a devil, could easily teach an apostle how to become an apostate and a traitor.

But he could not teach him how to betray the religion of Christ, when he betrayed Christ himself. Neither could they, who put Christ to death, extinguish that religion. On the contrary, by so doing, they took the only way that could be taken to perfect the great work, and to establish it in the world. They intended the murder of one man; but, without knowing what they did, they wrought the salvation of all men. Wicked as they were, they did the work of God. The storms of the natural, and the crimes of the moral, world, be they ever so boisterous or enormous, are forced to promote the designs of him who permits the one, and causes the other. If a man will be wicked, will be rebellious against God, will be malicious towards men, will set himself to do all the mischief he can towards all men, and, as far as in him lies, endeavour to disappoint the very end of his creation; Providence will not, indeed, always hinder him (any more than it will a plague from spreading misery or death) from pursuing the dictates of his own infernal heart; but it will bring a greater good out of all that evil, and only permits the evil for the sake of the good. The wickedest of men must still, although against his intention, be the servant of God who made him. And although he will not be good, he shall be a useful servant too; for God

will not be disappointed. It is true, he hath made angels and men free; but, free as they are, and wicked as they may be, he will, as their Maker and Governor, be served by them, one way or another. If they will not serve him willingly, and be happy, they must serve him against their wills, and be miserable; for he did not make them altogether for their own sakes, much less for the service of his enemy. Accordingly, Herod may persecute or despise; the Jewish chiefs may plot and bribe; Judas may sell and betray; Pilate may compliment the mob with the life of a man whom he found innocent; and the devil may, by his power over their hearts, inspire and manage this whole scheme of iniquity and murder; but still 'there is one higher than the highest that regardeth.' There is one higher than them all, that shall control and overrule the whole transaction, although the blackest hell ever contrived, and turn it to the most glorious exemplification of goodness; to the happiest of all events; to the retrieval of a lost, and to the salvation of a desperate, world.

How ought we to admire the goodness, and adore the wisdom, and revere the power of God, in this most important, this most amazing, piece of history! Can any thing give such a rock for faith to build on, or ground for such a battery against sin? If Judas, without speaking or writing, demonstrates the truth of a religion he did all he could to suppress, who will not believe it to be true? If our infidels will not listen to the arguments of Peter or Paul, upon a supposition that they were deceivers, surely they will admit Judas, who acted a contrary part, and was of a spirit truly modern, to be their apostle. Whoever considers attentively his whole story, must go away either a fool, or a Christian.

Nor does this history furnish stronger arguments for faith, than it does against sin. To the man whose conviction it hath already wrought, it will set the sins of covetousness, dissimulation, treachery, and murder, in a stronger light, and paint them in fouler colours, than they can otherwise be possibly seen in. It will shew him what conscience, enraged to the highest, can do, even in the most hardened minds. It will give him a most sensible and awful proof of speedy vengeance, executed by the devil, in a mortal fit of despair, on the wretch he had so lately seduced. To con-

clude; it will lead his eyes forward to the cross of Christ, and shew him what sin is, by the infinite value and dignity of the atonement made for it; and, while he beholds the blood streaming from his Saviour's wounds, it will remind him, that he too must be a traitor, and a Judas, if, by his sins, he again puts Christ to open shame, and crucifies him afresh. We are all the disciples, and some of us the apostles, of Christ, enlisted into his service, as well as the twelve, by a solemn vow or covenant. The honour of him and his holy religion, and the well-being of his spiritual body the church, are intrusted with us. If, therefore, we grossly or perseveringly sin, we are traitors and Judases, as well as he whose treachery gave occasion to this Discourse; for do we not expose the name of Christ, and the credit of his religion, to the contempt and ridicule of infidels, for the pleasure or profit accruing from our sins? Do we not sell and betray our Master to a severer cross than that on mount Calvary? I say severer; for surely such it was in the estimation of Christ himself, who willingly suffered death in his natural, that he might give life to his mystical, body, which we by our sins corrupt, deface, and do all we can to destroy. But, whatever the debauched, or the ambitious, may say, to clear himself of a copartnership in sin with Iscariot, let not the covetous, or the treacherous, who postpone the honour and service of Christ to the peculiar vices of that traitor, deny that he is a Judas. What can so strongly demonstrate the force of that unhappy prejudice, wherewith the minds of people, otherwise of the clearest understandings, are blinded by a too close conversation with the seducing world, as that they cannot see their sins in this just and affecting light, in which both reason and Scripture represent them!

God grant, however, that we may at length lay these things to heart, as we ought to do; and to him be the praise, and the honour, and the glory, of our faith and obedience, now, and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XVIII.

HUMAN LIBERTY, WHAT; AND HOW TO BE OBTAINED.

JOHN VIII. 31, 32.

If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.
And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

OUR Saviour here calls such as believe in his word, and always continue steadfast in that belief, his real disciples; who, in consequence of their faith, steadily adhered to, have his promise, that they 'shall know the truth,' the great truth, that is, the true religion; and that 'this truth' so known, 'shall make them free.' The Jews, who heard him, looking on themselves as free already, took this amiss, and said, 'We be Abraham's children, and were never in bondage to any man; how sayest thou then, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever ommitteth sin is the servant of sin;' by which he delicately intimates, that, although they were not servants to any particular man, yet they were the slaves of sin; and promises, that the truths of his word shall deliver them from this worst sort of bondage, by reforming their future lives, and discharging them from the punishment of past sins.

Here it is to be observed in general, that liberty is connected with truth, and slavery with error, in the very nature of things. He who knows the truth in any branch of knowledge, knows how to direct and govern himself in that respect, and therefore is so far free; whereas he who is ignorant of it, or what is worse, who holds errors opposite to it, must, in every thought or action relative to that part of knowledge, either think and act absurdly, or be led and governed by others, which is so far an instance of servitude, as it implies subjection and dependance. If a close observer of things will be at the pains to trace this doctrine upward, he will find every being possessed of so much liberty, or self-government, as he is possessed of wisdom, till he arrives at that Being, who is infinitely free, because he is infinitely wise. And if he pursues the same doctrine down-

ward, he will find every being so far necessarily subject, that is, either governed or enslaved, as he hath less reason and wisdom, till he comes to the fool and madman, who are wholly deprived of liberty. Hence it appears, that liberty, and even power, are the prerogative of wisdom; and subjection, nay, slavery, are the consequence of folly. It sometimes happens indeed, that in the communities of this world wisdom must truckle to folly; but this is nevertheless against the nature of things, and falls out only either by accident, or by the curse of God, who sets a fool to rule over such as are wiser than himself, for the punishment of a guilty nation.

It is evident, that our Saviour, in the passage from whence my text is taken, sets forth virtue or goodness as freedom, and vice as slavery; assigning to the former, as its principle, the knowledge of true religion; and to the latter, as its cause and source, the ignorance of that religion. It is also evident, that he points to his word, as the treasury from whence this knowledge is to be drawn. Hence it follows, that faith and freedom, that true Christianity and true liberty, are but different names for the same thing.

The libertine finds it hard to digest this doctrine. To believe in mysteries, to submit to positive institutions, and to regulate his life by an expectation of rewards and punishments, appear to him as instances of a too mean compliance in us; and the expectation of such compliance, as a proof of a too arbitrary will in its Author. Now, this proceeds from his entertaining a wrong notion both of human nature, and of human liberty.

In the first place, He does not consider, that man is, not only by his original nature, a subordinate and dependant, but also by his present nature, a corrupt and vicious creature; and that, while common sense vouches for the truth of the former observation, universal experience forces us to confess that of the latter.

Neither does he, in the second place, consider, as he ought to do, that a being, so subordinate, must be governed; nor that a being, so corrupt, requires correction; or, if he should admit the necessity both of government and correction, yet, having too slight notions of our dependance and corruption, and too airy an idea of liberty, he thinks he

ought neither to be governed nor corrected by such a faith, nor by such maxims as those of Christianity. He therefore pleads for an unlimited liberty of thinking, and for a less limited liberty of acting, than it is fit to give him.

Perhaps we shall do some service to him, or at least to others, not altogether so overweening, if we, with a just eye to human nature, state the right notion of liberty, in respect both to thought and action; and afterward shew, that Christianity, truly such, tends directly, and more powerfully than any thing else, to promote and preserve this liberty.

When we speak of liberty, as a thing we either wish for, or would keep, we mean by it something that is good, nay, highly conducive to our own happiness. Liberty, therefore, of thought, must be the power or faculty of thinking in such a manner as may make us truly wise. Whatsoever helps us to do this, promotes the liberty; and whatsoever hinders us to do it, causes or increases the slavery of our minds. So likewise liberty of acting must be the power or privilege of carrying into execution that wisdom we have acquired by liberty of thinking, or, in other words, of acting in such a manner as may conduce to our real happiness. Whatsoever helps us to do this, befriends our liberty; whatsoever hinders, enslaves us.

These positions are, and for ever will be, true; although, in order to think wisely, we should be confined to a particular way of thinking; and, in order to act rightly, should be obliged to act by certain rules; nay, although that way of thinking should not square in all things with our previous judgment, nor those rules of action with our humour and inclination; because, of ourselves, we are neither so wise, nor so well inclined, as to need no direction. Who are we? Are we not, in respect to knowledge, 'born as the wild ass's colt,' that is, totally ignorant? And when afterward we set ourselves to the acquisition of religious knowledge, are we not liable to infinite errors, and those of the grossest kinds? Do we not, therefore, stand in need of a teacher? Again, are we not subordinate beings? Are we not corrupt and sinful creatures? And do we not therefore stand in need of a governor?

Now, if God shall offer himself to be our teacher, surely the matter of his instructions must be true wisdom, and con-

sequently conducive to our real liberty, although, in some instances, it should be mysterious. To believe it, therefore, on his word, can be no infringement on our liberty of thinking. And farther, if God shall vouchsafe to be our governor, his laws must undoubtedly be the best rules of action, the most conformable to true wisdom, the most productive of our real happiness, and consequently of our liberty, as well when they oppose, as when they fall in with our inclinations. True religion consists, no doubt, in the knowledge of God and his will, and also of such helps and motives to obedience in us, as he shall judge expedient. Now, as he is incomprehensible, the knowledge of him must be in some degree mysterious. And, as we are extremely inattentive to our duty, and perversely wicked, the institution of positive duties, and the proposal of future rewards and punishments, may be highly conducive, may be necessary, to our reformation. Who is to judge in this case? The infinitely wise Teacher, and the unerring Governor? Or the foolish disciple, the refractory subject?

The truth is, man, ignorant and ill-disposed, must be both taught and governed. He is not to stomach it, if, at the best, he was made for subjection as well as the angels; and if, now he is become corrupt and wicked, he is put under such rules as are morally coercive. His liberty at first was but that of a subject and dependant; but since he is turned a rebel, must be reduced to narrower bounds. With the liberty these allow him he must be content, until submission and obedience have fitted him for larger limits. If, dissatisfied with these, he seeks for greater liberty before he is reclaimed to a greater degree of virtue, let him know that he cannot elope from the service of his natural Lord, but into a licentious kind of slavery to things that have no right to rule over him, wherein he will have no other liberty, but to be wicked and miserable.

A being destitute of reason is fit only for absolute subjection and total restraint. But a being, not only foolish, but perversely wicked, is the proper subject of severity and correction, as well as of restraint; and if found incorrigible, must either be destroyed, or put under an endless incapacity of doing mischief. Although, in civil society, the madman, the robber, and the cut-throat, object to these

rules, and plead for immunity; yet the wisdom of all lawgivers in this world adheres invariably to them, and makes the objection of such men one reason for its so doing. Yet this is so far from being an encroachment on civil liberty, that without it, no shadow of such liberty can be secured to men of better minds, nor any prospect of reformation provided for the yet dissolute and lawless part of mankind. Now, why shall that be objected to in God's kingdom, which is found so necessary in all other kingdoms? Or, in what respect does the expectation of punishments and rewards abridge our liberty more in his community than in any other? Hath he not 'made man from the beginning, and left him in the hand of his own counsel?' Hath he not 'set before him good and evil, life and death,' and left it to himself to choose? What greater liberty would he desire than this? Would he have leave to choose the evil of sin, without the evil of punishment? If this is the liberty he aims at, the laws neither of God nor man will allow it. But if in his nature there should be an unhappy disposition to choose the evil, he ought not surely to think it an infringement of his liberty, if God, by the aids of religion, should balance that disposition, and qualify him for a free and rational choice.

On the whole, then, who is free? Not he who can think of every thing just as he pleases; not he whose thoughts move like the wind, without any path or track; not he who, against the sense and reason of all other men, and the very nature of things, can take light or darkness, truth or falsehood, right or wrong, indifferently for each other; not the sceptic, to whom nothing is either self-evident or conclusive; not the brute, disguised in the figure of a man, whose affections and appetites go foremost, and force his head to follow. Neither is he free, who is subject to no laws of God or man, but is driven at random, as whim or passion dictate, into endless inconsistencies and excesses, in almost all the transactions of his life. If irregularity or vice are proofs of freedom, the madman and the murderer must be more at liberty than other men. He only is free, who, having wisely united into one his real interest or chief good, and his pleasure, is enabled, by the assistance of true religion, to pursue that steadily, in spite of all obstructions. This man is happy, both in pursuits and events; because success attends the

one, and pleasure the other. He therefore is free; because he thinks rightly, acts wisely, and enjoys fully, without either disappointment or repentance. He cannot be disappointed; for God hath so constituted the nature of things, and, by his providence, so directs the current of events, as to give success to the endeavours of such a man. The world itself was made, and is governed, for men like this. Again, as he cannot be disappointed of the happy ends he pursues, he hath no room for regret or repentance. God is the guardian of his liberty, and a sponsor for his happiness.

And who now, on the other hand, is the slave? It is not he who is imprisoned or in chains; nor he who is sold by one master to another, for a sum of money; for such restraints and hardships lie only on the body, and cannot last. Nor is he a slave who is taught to think justly, and act regularly, by the laws of God and man; nay, and hindered by both from so thinking and acting as to hurt himself. But he is a slave, who by ignorance, or prejudice, or passion, is tied down to a wrong way of thinking, and in consequence of that, to such a foolish or wicked way of acting, as tends only to his own misery or destruction. This man is not only a slave, but a blind brute, fit only to be led or driven by one who sees the way. 'What is liberty,' says Cicero? 'It is the power of living as we please. Who, therefore, lives as he pleases, but he that follows that which is right? It happens to the wise man only to do nothing unwillingly, nothing with grief or compulsion. Who can deny that all the trivial, all the covetous, all the wicked and dissolute part of mankind are slaves? Shall I esteem him free whom a woman governs and gives laws to; whom she orders, commands, forbids, as she pleases? Who can decline nothing she imposes; who dare refuse nothing she asks? She demands, and he must give; she calls, and he must come; she turns him out, and he must be gone; she threatens, and he must tremble. Now I think we ought to call this man not only a slave, but the very worst of slaves, although ever so highly dignified in point of family and fortune.' He who will not take this doctrine from our Saviour, may perhaps pay it some respect, when he sees it issue from the pen of a philosopher. But what does his own experience tell him? Does it not speak the same language? Hath he not himself

sometimes groaned under this very species of slavery? Or if free from this, hath no other tyrant used him as scurvily? Perhaps when the bottle calls him, he cannot hinder his hand from raising that liquor to his mouth, which he knows will degrade him to the condition of a brute. Or perhaps his imperious money, although he hath purchased it with his conscience and his soul, will not suffer the covetous wretch to touch it, when he is perishing for want of food and raiment. With what assurance can one, subject to these or the like passions, call himself a free man, when his whole conduct, with an infinite train of sufferings are prescribed to him by an internal tyrant, that employs its absolute power over him to no other end, but to make him despicable and miserable.

But there are a sort of men who cannot be persuaded, that any thing from within themselves can possibly enslave them; whereas the truth is, if they can guard against slavery from this quarter, we may venture to ensure their liberty against all attacks from without. God hath bestowed this happy, this glorious, privilege on man, that nothing, but himself, can enslave him; that nothing outward can bring him into subjection, who is master of his own passions and desires. 'Whosoever is his own,' as Seneca expresses it, 'cannot possibly be the property of another.' It is owing to a gross mistake on this head, that a libertine jealousy about freedom is always carried outward. It suspects reports, authorities, injunctions; but it is in no pain about its own prejudices or passions. The civil libertine is apprehensive only of the magistrate; the theological, of revelation. Against these they watch; the one with his polemical, the other with his political, eye, turned always outward, while self-inspection is wholly neglected, as if there were nothing within that could possibly endanger their liberty. Hence it is, that we see so many of those abject slaves, I just now described, disputing and fighting for freedom with a zeal utterly preposterous in every one, but him who is already free within. If we look a little deeper into these men, we shall find, that, notwithstanding all their pretences, they only contend for slavery against liberty. The laws of God and of civil society would correct their vices, and give them liberty; but they are enslaved to their vices, and therefore

struggle only for the glorious privilege of continuing slaves to those vices. Their present principles have granted them a charter to be wicked. Religion and government would revoke or annul this grant; and consequently every thing they prescribe must be regarded as an encroachment on liberty, if it hath ever so remote a tendency to this end. Thus it appears, that Atheism and anarchy, although they all do not know it, constitute the very essence of that liberty they contend for.

Having thus seen, that such men only are truly free, whom nothing hinders to think and act for their own good; let us now examine whether Christianity, truly such, is not better fitted, than any thing else, to promote and preserve this liberty.

In order to arrive at satisfaction, in this inquiry, it will be necessary to lay aside our vanity and self-conceit, that we may the more clearly see how miserably our minds are enslaved, both by nature and corruption, and an habitual indulgence of our passions, to a wrong bias of thinking, and a still more depraved disposition in acting. Having by this method found, as we certainly shall, that we are the slaves of such prejudices and passions, as tend only to undo us; we are then to consider, what the force of that engine must be, which is able to break and throw off a yoke, tied on us both by nature and habit. This duly considered, we shall quickly perceive, that nothing, but the power of God, working by the spirit of true religion, is equal to so arduous an undertaking. Convinced of this, it will then be our business candidly to examine, whether Christianity, as set forth in the Scriptures, is not the only religion, that can prove itself the gift of God; whether its institutions, its sanctions, and its internal aids of grace, do not bespeak the presence and power of God; and whether, therefore, it is not through this alone, that we can reasonably hope for his assistance, in order to the recovery of true liberty. The time will not permit me at present to shew, how, in every step of this inquiry, if fairly made, the conclusion must always result in favour of Christianity. All I can do, on this occasion, is to press for the inquiry, in full assurance, that, once it is made, it must terminate in a clear conviction of the doctrine I would urge under this head. Let a man who finds, with Socrates and

Plato, the necessity of divine assistance, bring his reason alone to this examination, and he will be so far from meeting with any thing at the entrance, which may seem to require too easy assent, or afterward too great submissions, that we may venture to assure him, he will find every thing calculated to satisfy his judgment, while he inquires, and every thing, once he hath embraced this religion, wisely adapted to the great end of promoting his liberty. He will find, in short, that true Christianity, and true freedom, are but one and the same thing. His Christian faith will bring him under no other governor but God, whom, if we believe Seneca, and a greater than Seneca, right reason, it is liberty to obey. It will give him no other law, than such as he would enact for himself, if he consulted with reason and nature. It will set eternal happiness and misery before him; and, if neither the love of the former, nor the terror of the latter, can fix his choice, it will promote his liberty of election by the power of the Holy Spirit, balancing the depravity of his sinful inclinations. And even when all this fails, and he transgresses, it will offer him the benefit of an atonement and pardon, on a sincere repentance. These, and other the like important notices, or gracious overtures, will dilate and enlarge his heart, will rectify and exalt his understanding, and teach him to look up from the wretched vanities that have misled the one, and the detestable pleasures that have enslaved the other, to infinitely greater and better things above. His fears, having taken this upward turn, will be such as true wisdom approves of. His love, and other affections, will acquire a purity and grandeur, suitable to the infinite dignity of the objects they aspire to. Thus, instead of being the despicable slave of a degenerate nature, miserably imposed on and insulted by every contemptible trifle, he will find himself, not only delivered from servitude, but ennobled, and exalted into a rank of beings superior to that his nature, even when innocent, could have placed him in. To conclude; he will find himself that happy man, of whom St. Ambrose, with equal propriety and beauty, observes, that, ‘Place him in what circumstances of worldly servitude you will, he is always free; for he it is who is not captivated by lust, who is not bound with the chains of avarice, who is not imprisoned under the dread of accusation, who is not ruffled with things

present, nor terrified with things to come.' Philosophy, I own, may speculate in this strain, as well as religion; but let such, as are acquainted with both, judge, whether of the two hath the better grounds whereon to found the prospect of practice. 'We do not (saith one of the fathers, speaking of his fellow-christians) talk great things, but live them.' This most sensible expression states the real difference, on a fair comparison, between the exemplification of Christian and philosophical principles, when tried in practice. The spirit of the first is a substantial and powerful morality, which rises on the mind, in size and strength, the more it is considered; whereas that of the latter lies in a pretty turn of words, and a certain pomp of expression, which evaporates into nothing, on a close inquiry into its foundation: the philosophical morality being unenforced by proper authority and motives.

That I may not seem to have spoken without authority, give me leave now to remind you, that the imperfect sketch, both of our natural slavery, and Christian liberty, here laid before you, is drawn from the holy Scriptures themselves. The Scripture, saith St. Paul, 'hath concluded all under sin.' It represents us all as sold under sin, before baptism; as the servants, or slaves, of sin. And, as sin is the transgression of God's law, it tells us, we are liable to death, the wages, or punishment, of sin. 'By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.' In this deplorable condition did the gospel find us, when Christ was sent 'to proclaim liberty to the captives, to preach the perfect law of liberty.' whereby we are to be reformed and set free from the yoke of sin itself; and to 'offer up his life a sacrifice for sin,' whereby we are exempted from death, the punishment of sin, and entitled to eternal life, as the free subjects and 'children of God.' We, being thus 'delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God,' are exhorted to 'stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,' as the most exalted privilege of our new birth-right.

What then? Shall we sin, because we are redeemed both from the rigour and curse of the law? God forbid. We are so far from being called to a liberty of sinning, that we are

made the servants of God, and called to a freedom from sin, in a thorough reformation. We are no longer to be 'the servants of sin, but of God;' and being now 'made free from sin, and become the servants of God,' we are 'to have our fruit unto holiness, that the end may be everlasting life.' Although we are free, we are to remember, that our freedom is only that of creatures and subordinate beings. We are to look upon ourselves as free indeed, yet not so as 'to use our liberty for a cloak of maliciousness; but as the servants of God,' as still dependent on him, who cannot look on iniquity without indignation. We have been called, it is true, unto liberty; only we are not to 'use our liberty for an occasion to the flesh; for whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.' Our Christian liberty is so far from rendering obedience needless, or countenancing sin, that it puts us under infinitely stronger obligations to holiness, than we were before, and that in order to preserve us free; for what is our freedom, but a freedom from the slavery of sin? We are to know, that, 'if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth' (that truth, which my text says should make us free from sin) 'there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing; and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?'

Although our liberty is the highest excellence our nature, in its best state, or utmost improvement, can boast of; yet we are never to forget, that we owe all our sin and misery to an abuse of this excellence. We are, therefore, with all possible diligence, to guard against new instances of a like misapplication, now that the restoration of our liberty hath cost so much. And this we are to do the rather, on account of that too natural ambition, which is ever prompting us to wish for greater degrees of liberty, without teaching us to pursue it through the purification of our nature; but, on the contrary, tempting us to extend it, with a

view to the gratification of our pride and other lawless passions, with impunity. This is that dangerous lust of liberty, or rather licence, to which we owe the present dissolute cry for freedom of thought and action. There are many who can brook no restraint, although it is ever so apparently necessary to the recovery or preservation of their true liberty. The winds of their doctrines, or opinions, must for a time, have leave to blow which way they will, and as high as they please, that the waves of their passions may toss and swell. The Divine wisdom, which hath taught us to think more soberly of liberty, tells us, that these men while they promise themselves, and such as listen to them, 'liberty, are themselves the servants or slaves of sin.' Although we claim the privilege of thinking freely, as well as them, yet we do it with due deference and submission to God's infinitely better judgment, and are ready to employ his word, his sacraments, and other spiritual 'weapons of our warfare,' in 'casting down' our own 'vain imaginations,' or reasonings, 'and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and in bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.' Such is our free-thinking, free and unlimited, but by the rules of reason, as to every thing not prejudged by God; but as to such things as he hath pronounced on, absolutely determined by his sentence; and yet not the less free for this; for surely he who thinks freely must think justly, that infinite wisdom cannot err, and that human reason may. And as we thus submit our thoughts, so we make a like voluntary tender of actions, looking only for such a liberty as is consistent with duty, that God's commandments and our freedom may both have scope. Nay, we think, we cannot act freely, if we do not obey his injunctions; for, as we think with David on this subject, so, as far as in us lies, we resolve with him, 'to walk at liberty; because we seek the precepts of God,' the due observation whereof being necessary to free us from the tyranny of sin, and consequently the most powerful ally of that liberty we aspire to. And whereas, on the other hand, no heart is fit for a thorough active service of God, but such as is free, disengaged, and greatly resolved, so we beseech him to dilate and enlarge our hearts, that we may run the way of his commandments. Thus it is, that we, as Christians, judge of that

liberty our religion confers on us, and endeavour to improve it.

To recapitulate and apply what hath been said, give me leave to conclude with an observation or two. In the first place, to be hindered from doing such things as may hurt ourselves is, in no sense or propriety, an encroachment on our liberty; for no one thinks his liberty infringed by being debarred of that which he does not desire; and no one desires that which will do him more harm than good, in which case it is said to hurt him on the whole, provided he foresees the overplus of evil it threatens him with. And even when he does not, if he is convinced the authority that forbids it does, he will think it no detriment to his liberty to have an evil prevented, wherein, as he did not foresee it, he might have involved himself.

In the next place, to be enjoined that which is good for us, is no diminution of our liberty, whether we be sensible of its expediency or not; for if we are, then the commandment, falling in with our judgment and desire, can be no encroachment on the freedom of our will. And when we are not sensible the commandment enjoins that which is beneficial to us; I mean, when we know not this of ourselves; we may be convinced of it by our knowledge of his equity and goodness, who imposes it; which brings it under the same rule with a commandment, the tendency whereof we know of ourselves to be beneficial.

Now, we are neither to act like a conceited child, who refuses what his parent desires him to take, because he does not see the good of it; nor like a froward one, who refuses what he knows is good, and actually desires, merely because he is bid to take it, out of a notion, that it is slavish to have what we know to be good imposed on us by authority. If the law is general, although it may be intended principally, or only, for the weak and wicked; yet he who is otherwise cannot think it slavish to conform, because he sees its general use.

We can have hardly a temptation to think our liberty curtailed by any of the injunctions laid on us by revealed religion, but what may arise from our ignorance of the connexion between the injunction and our happiness. But if we have reason to believe the former is the will of God, our

suspicions, as to that connexion, must be wholly groundless. We know so little of natural connexions, that there are but few cases wherein we can safely say, this can or cannot, be the cause of that. But as all the powers of nature are known to God, and as he can supernaturally annex his graces or assistances to what means he pleases, we may be sure all means of his appointment must be efficacious, though we do not, cannot, see how. Fasting is in itself a thing morally indifferent; but if God should enjoin it, and we by experience should find it, when religiously practised, exceedingly conducive to the reduction of our inordinate affections, and to the ardour of our devotions, we ought to think it equally conducive to our liberty, on the supposition that a heart warm only to God, enjoys the highest freedom, though we cannot see, how effects so purely spiritual are produced by a cause altogether corporeal. In like manner, the being sprinkled with water, or the receiving of bread and wine, are things perfectly indifferent in themselves, as to our souls; yet may be so applied to religious purposes, and so connected with God's grace, as to produce by methods wholly inconceivable to us, such happy effects as it would be high presumption in us to hope for, without the promise and appointment of God.

Whom now, or what are we to obey; for obey we must, as we neither are, nor ever can be, absolutely independent? Shall we, in order to be free, associate with the libertine, who flies to infidel haranguers, as he does to lewd women; and to irreligious books, as he does to a bottle; who goes a whoring after loose principles, and fuddles his understanding with the sweet poison of unbelief; who thinks it freedom to wallow in stupidity and corruption, as long as an insensible conscience can give countenance to his gaiety? What, in the name of common sense, is liberty, if this is not slavery? Does liberty consist in a total subversion or extinction of reason? Is it an irretrievable servitude to lust and passion? If it is, then the worst man is always the most free; and he only is at liberty, who ought to lie for ever in chains. Let us not if we have any affection for liberty, join ourselves to such a slavish crew. Let us not be frightened at the name of government; nor, because passion and appetite have in themselves no tincture of order or government, imagine we

shall be free under their influence. Although such masters cannot rule, they can conquer, they can captivate, they can torture and oppress. Any one of them, if indulged to an excess, will turn a tyrant; that is, a governor, without a rule to govern by.

No: let us voluntarily give the reins to him who made us, because we know he is gracious; or, at least, prudently, as men who have a just apprehension of his power. Him we must either obey for his goodness, or fear for his indignation. Our subjection to him depends not on our will; but our obedience he leaves to our own free election. Since we 'must be subject, ought we not also to obey?' But why should we deduce our duty from our subjection? Is it not perfect freedom to serve him? Is it not joy and rapture to please him? Are we so mean-spirited as to stoop to the service of the creature, who were born for that of the Creator; or so stupid as to call this slavery, and that freedom? We only want a little grandeur of soul to fill us with disdain for the pitiful masters, that may have hitherto usurped a dominion over us, and with a just indignation at ourselves for having meanly crouched to a servitude, every way infamous and shameful. This will be sufficient to make us shake off the despicable yoke. If to this we add a little true ambition, it will teach us to look upward, and aim our services at an object, infinitely amiable and excellent, infinitely great and glorious; whom to serve is not only liberty, but honour and grandeur. And, for our encouragement, there is no master, whom it will be so much in our power to please, if inclination be not wanting; because 'his yoke is easy, and his burden light;' because 'he loves us,' and because he hath promised to assist us.

Let us, therefore, humbly apply to him for the aids of his Holy Spirit, that, strengthened by his all-powerful grace, we may be delivered from the slavery of sin, and raised to the service of him, who is the Lord of lords, and the King of kings, the only eternal and adorable God; to whom be all service and duty, all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now, and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XIX.

RELIGION NECESSARY TO CIVIL SOCIETY.

1 Pet. ii. 17.

Fear God. Honour the king.

Though these, considered in themselves, are two distinct and independent precepts; yet they seem to be so connected in this place by the apostle, that the latter may be looked upon as the consequence of the former; not only because it is placed immediately after it, and therefore, for coherence' sake, must be supposed to be some way deducible from it; but because it follows in the nature of things. The king can never hope to be effectually honoured, where God is not feared; and therefore the apostle bids us, a little above, 'submit ourselves to every ordinance of man' (i. e. every law imposed on us by proper authority) 'for the Lord's sake;' to whom belongeth all power, and whom if we duly fear and reverence, we cannot but obey those who act under him, and share his power in this world.

Agreeable to this, is that passage in chap. xiii. of the Epistle to the Romans, where St. Paul bids 'every soul be subject to the higher powers;' for this reason, because 'there is no power, but of God;' and because 'he that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God;' and 'they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation.' It is for this reason that we must needs be subject, 'not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake.'

It cannot be denied, that the Christians of the first age had reasons, peculiar to themselves, for honouring the king, and obeying the civil magistrate; such as, to prevent persecution; and to shew the world, that they did not intend to stir up rebellion under pretence of introducing a new religion. These, no doubt, the two apostles had in view, when they delivered the precepts already cited; especially St.

Paul, who was then writing to such converts to Christianity as lived immediately under that power, which it would have been most scandalous and most dangerous to provoke.

But, besides these, they intended chiefly to apply our religion to the assistance and preservation of civil government in general; commanding all Christians, by virtue of their faith in Christ, as they feared God, and expected to be judged by him, to honour and obey the king, i. e. to observe the laws, to preserve the peace of society; and to submit patiently to whatsoever the supreme governor should think proper to lay upon them.

This was putting their civil obedience upon the same footing with their religious; and teaching them to make the whole strength of their Christian principles as useful to the state in this life, as they were to their souls in order to the next. This was backing their reverence of the king with their fear of God, and threatening eternal damnation to rebellion.

This doctrine, thus strongly inculcated, intimates also to us the true origin or basis of civil power, which is God. He is the sole owner and proprietor of all power, particularly of the civil. 'By him kings reign, and princes decree justice. He is the Lord of lords, and King of kings.' Through whatsoever channels of election, compact, conquest, or hereditary right, the civil power is derived, from this its only source, it still belongs to God, and must be accounted for to him. Now, that which the absolute supremacy of God thus authorizes, the nature of man renders perpetually necessary. Considered in himself, and without respect to God, as his supreme governor, he can neither subsist in society, nor out of it. How can a creature, so crooked and so untoward as we are in our dispositions, so corrupt and wild by nature, converse together with safety? And how, on the other hand, can creatures, so infirm and helpless as each of us is by himself, subsist apart from the rest of mankind? Our natural wants call us together, indeed, with a voice as pressing as necessity can make it; but, at the same time, selfishness, lust, pride, resentment, with a large train of violent appetites, and fierce desires, in a manner forbid all commerce with one another. It is in vain to deny, that the present nature of man, before it is moulded into a better form

by religious culture, and taught to fear and obey Almighty God, places him in this unhappy situation. His natural ignorance likewise, not only of religion, but a thousand other articles of knowledge, necessary to him in every condition of life, makes it still more evident, that, unless he hath the benefit of instruction, which God and society only can give him, he must perish, long before he can possibly acquire a competency of knowledge. Hence it may appear, that he is as absolutely dependent on society, as society is on God, for subsistence. We cannot live out of society; nor can society subsist without laws and sanctions; nor is that to be expected without magistrates. And after all, there is no integrity to be expected from the magistrates, nor honesty and obedience from the people, unless an infinitely wise, just, and powerful Being, is believed to superintend and govern the whole.

So then religion is so far from dwindling down into mere human laws, and civil government, or vanishing into mere morality, according to the senseless and wicked notion now in vogue, that civil government is no government, and morality an empty name, if they do not both borrow their very soul and being from religion. When we say civil power is derived from God, we do not mean, that, like a person who once founded a kingdom, and dying, left it to his successors, he hath retired from the government, and given up his supreme authority to a succession of men. No; he is always on the throne. He interferes in all that passes; and, were it not generally believed that he does so, the race of mankind must either perish off the earth; or God must, contrary to the infinite majesty of his being, and contrary to the whole scheme of nature, assume a sensible appearance, and interpose miraculously on every particular occasion. But, without doing this, the very subsistence of society shews, he not only was the origin, but still is, and must be, the basis, of civil power; insomuch that it is impossible to assign any one act of authority in the community, wherein God is not visible to a thinking mind. From what hath been said, it follows, that the utmost care ought to be taken, in every society, to turn the attention of all its magistrates and members strongly on God's continual inspection, and future judgment.

This is undoubtedly the only true foundation to build the peace, the security, and happiness, of any state on.

First, Because no nation, nor form of government, can either long or happily subsist without virtue; nor virtue, at all, without religion. The history of all the commonwealths and kingdoms in the world verify this undeniably to us. The power of any constitution has always grown and declined, according to the rise and fall of frugality, industry, courage, and justice.

Again, It is as observable, that these virtues have always flourished exactly in proportion to the strength of religion, where any thing like a rational scheme of religion hath obtained; and still, as reverence for a divine nature, and faith in a future life, have abated, so virtue too, by the same steps, hath decreased.

All lawgivers, whether made sensible of this by maturely weighing the nature of man, or by observations made on what happened to other states before theirs, have used their utmost endeavours to propagate the expectation of a future distribution of punishments to vice, and rewards to virtue, among their people.

Some have made this observation to create a suspicion, that all religion, and the Christian among the rest, is a state trick, and owes its being to the invention of politicians. But to suppose this, is to suppose that God, who knows we cannot live out of society, and that society cannot subsist without religion, would leave us to support ourselves and society upon falsehood and imposture. But, however, this suspicion can never be rationally fixed on Christianity; since it is so well known to the knowing part of the world, that this religion, contrary to the manner of introducing and establishing all other religions, made its way into the world, and at length attained to establishment, in opposition to kings and emperors, to state-stratagem and power.

However, it is only our business at present to observe, that there hath never yet been a constitution put together, without great regard had to the establishment of some kind of religion or other; that, while that religion supported its credit, and was zealously adhered to, the virtue of particular men, and the strength of the state, grew and rested secure, in proportion to the soundness of that religion, and the

strength of that faith wherewith it was believed in; but that dissolution of manners and government both hath soon followed the contempt of religion.

From this distant view, we may easily see the stately pile of civil power, firmly founded, and highly exalted, by the influence of religion and virtue; and thrown to the ground again by the malignant effects of infidelity and vice. We may see it rise in a rude age of religion and rigid virtue; and moulder away to nothing in another refined age of religious incredulity and luxury.

But, if we afford it a nearer inspection, we shall soon perceive, that these effects are unavoidable; that, to the credit of religion, no constitution ever rose to any considerable height, without its necessary assistance; and that, to the eternal shame of infidelity, no constitution was ever ruined, but by forgetting, that 'there is a God who judgeth the earth;' and this, not so much by bringing the wrath of God on it (for God could never be moved to revenge the contempt of a false and idolatrous religion), as by a consequence absolutely necessary in the nature of things.

For, wheresoever the sense of a divine presence, and the expectation of immortality, have prevailed, there honesty, humanity, and virtue of every kind, have, for the same reason, prevailed; there trade has flourished, supported by frugality and industry, the constant attendants of religion and virtue, and nourished by the security of property, in the midst of integrity and universal credit. How cheerfully could they, who believed in God and a future judgment, believe and trust each other? There the laws must have been strictly obeyed, because the obedience proceeded not from the fear of human justice, which may be biassed; not from the fear of temporal punishments, which may be evaded; but of divine justice, which there is no evading; and of eternal penalties, which there is no avoiding. There the laws must have been faithfully and impartially put in execution; because the magistrates and judges, afraid of appeals to God's judgment, could not but have had particular regard to the justice of their own. There alone the sanctity of oaths, by which all laws operate, and without which no nation can subsist, must have been religiously preserved, where religion itself was zealously cultivated.

Now, as it is unreasonable to expect virtue where there is no religion, so it is, humanly speaking, impossible that a society should not thrive apace, where religion has planted the virtues of industry and frugality among the lower kind of people, and temperance and justice among the higher; and those of honesty, humanity, and universal trust, among all. Each member of such a society must, in his private capacity, effectually promote the public welfare, because he pursues his own particular benefit by such a life as tends directly to the profit of the public. He only is to be suffered in any society, whose good coincides with that of his country: now this is never to be expected, but where religion and honesty are to be found. Whosoever is void of these, will be apt to set up a separate and inconsistent interest of his own. The religiously honest, therefore, is the best friend to his country in the time of peace and prosperity.

Nor does he less distinguish himself in its service, when wars attack, or other public calamities afflict it. As he has no way of securing his own person or fortune, but by protecting his country; so he is always ready to share the one with it, and hazard the other for it. He looks upon it as the storehouse of all his temporal peace, and wealth, and happiness. He, therefore, loves it; he, therefore, fights with resolution round it; and, like a wise as well as honest man, does all he can to defend it. It is not so with the irreligious and dishonest. He hath interests that may be secured, without securing his country; nay, his notions of interest will suffer him to sell his country, he having no religion to tie his conscience to the prospect of a higher and more lasting interest, than such as may be made here by direct or indirect means, as either shall serve his turn.

That country or society must undoubtedly be in the fairest way to be powerful and happy, whose members consider themselves as qualifying their souls for an infinitely more glorious society, by serving, promoting, and protecting, the present; and whose religion and virtue have assigned them, for their own private interests, a share of the public good.

If experience had not proved it to us, reason itself might shew us, that this must be the case. But, if it be otherwise,

all history must be false, and all observation wrong. It is certain, any constitution that provides sufficiently for the cultivation of religion, must, in so doing, make the best provision for its own security and welfare every way; and must accordingly flourish secure and happy, if it be not very deficient in other respects. So, on the other hand, when once faith, and religious principles, begin to be generally disregarded by the people of any nation, that nation must decline apace. And if the legislative part of it shall make laws prejudicial to its credit and efficacy, or take no care about it, as a matter unworthy their regard, that nation must rush headlong to its own destruction; no wealth, no power, no policy, being sufficient to stay it.

In a constitution like ours, liberty is only to be preserved by an exact balance of power among the several constituent parts. But how shall such a balance be preserved without religion? What is there else to hinder the ambition of one part from swelling and encroaching upon the other, or the avarice and servility of the other from selling that share of power it is trusted with? And when ambition hath actually raised a competition, for instance, between prerogative and privilege, what is there to moderate that ambition, or so to decide the difference, that liberty and the constitution may be preserved? Are we to call in a foreign power? Or are we to make the sword our umpire? From neither of these can we safely hope for a just decision. The influence of conscience and religion only over the great, and over the bulk of the people, can keep the balance even.

Nor is there any safety for property, where there is no religion. Locks and bolts, and human laws, are no sufficient defence against fraud, which can evade the laws; and force, that can easily break through the slight security of a bolt or door; when there is no conscience to manacle the one, nor fear of Divine justice to restrain the other. Nay, there can be no fear of even human laws; because truth can never be known, nor facts proved, without oaths; nor can oaths, without a sense of religion, prove any thing.

Peace, too, is as little to be expected in an infidel constitution. Wrath and resentment, and false notions of honour, must prevail, and fill the minds of those, who ought to live in harmony and good neighbourhood, with fury and revenge,

unless they think that 'vengeance belongeth unto the Lord, and that he will repay;' unless religion have taught them to expect a temporal blessing as a reward for meek-spiritedness, as well as forgiveness of their own sins, upon a generous forgiveness of their neighbours.

And if, where there is no religion nor faith in a future state, malice and revenge are at full liberty, how shall life be safe? The proud, the wrathful, and the envious, may, when they please, without fear of punishment in this life (for perjury can screen them), drive the souls of their weaker brethren from their bodies and this world, if they do not expect to meet them in another before the great Author and Guardian of human life.

As a constitution, then, that is irreligious can give no security to liberty, property, peace, or life, it is infinitely worse than no constitution at all; for when laws, I mean operative laws, do no good, they must do harm. Every prudent and honest man will endeavour to remove himself as fast as he can from under such a ruinous and tottering heap of iniquity and oppression; and, when such are once removed, the degenerate mass that is left behind must soon be destroyed. A society, made up of none but dishonest members, can never subsist. Their own injustice and wickedness will save Divine vengeance a blow, and pull confusion and judgment on themselves, by an unavoidable and inseparable connexion between wickedness and ruin, which, sooner or later, will always be found naturally necessary in human affairs.

Some of our modern refiners of philosophy would needs persuade us, that revealed religion is not necessary to the well ordering and government of human affairs; and that our natural sentiments of honesty, with the native beauty of virtue, would be sufficient to keep us within such bounds as are necessary to the well-being of society.

But as crimes of all shapes and sizes, though ever so differently circumstanced, have broke through the feeble cobweb of natural morality, with almost as much ease as if there had been nothing to oppose them; so common experience and observation can sufficiently refute the thin and subtle reasonings of these notional libertines, who would persuade us, that human nature, left to itself, would cultivate virtue,

and be happy, when it cannot even do it with the help of human laws: no; nor, say they, with the help of Christianity. But it is certain, that as honesty and virtue do still prevail among some, it is as certain, that, if Christianity were entirely laid aside, and no religious alternative substituted in its place, virtue must be effectually banished with it, even from the breasts of those who are now honest; for, in a state of pure infidelity, a temporal self-interest, in which there is no virtue, would always predominate, though ever so much in prejudice of right, though ever so much against those sentiments of morality which we now reverence as natural.

Now if, with the little religion that is left, the little honesty too were once banished, our country, like Sodom, after the departure of Lot, must perish, even though there were no Providence to pour down fire and brimstone on it from heaven.

Since then, society cannot subsist without virtue, nor virtue be expected without religion; and since every constitution, as well as every particular man, hath a principle of self-preservation; it is its chief business and interest to secure to itself so necessary a preservative. And as it is its interest to be religious, so it has the same right, with an individual, to choose its religion; for, if it is absolutely necessary that it should be religious, considered as a society, it must be as necessary that it should have some particular religion. Now this is impossible, unless it have a right to choose; for civil constitutions, or societies, no more than single persons, since they are made up of such, can believe without due conviction, or embrace without choice.

It may be asked here, How can a society choose one religion to be publicly adhered to, without taking away from its several members their individual right of choice? I answer, That, by society, I only mean such a combination of men as approve one form of government, and one religion; and who are therefore determined, by their own particular choice, to profess the one, and enter into the other. If, in any country, there is a mixture of such as do dissent from the constitution, either on a civil or spiritual account, they are only members in part, and not properly; and, if they dissent on both accounts, they are no members at all.

Every man hath a right to choose a religion for himself, which no power on earth can take from him; but, if it be his choice to join himself to a religion different from, or contrary to, that of the society of which in civil matters he is a member, the society has as undoubted a right to preserve itself, and its religion, from the inconsistent or opposite effects of his, by laying him under such constitutional disabilities as may answer that end, without bearing on his conscience, in what regards himself only.

A constitution without religion in it, or a God above it, must be such as none but devils could desire to enter into, and none but devils could live in. An infidel society, or an atheistical nation, if it could be supposed, must be shocking to reason and humanity, and a monster infinitely more fierce and mishapen than even the Leviathan of Hobbes. Our nature turns from it with terror and abhorrence, as a thing hideous to the imagination and heart of man.

Some religion therefore the constitution must choose. But there are certain difficulties in relation to the extent of this right to choose a religion, which have given society no small disturbance, and which are not yet adjusted.

There is certainly a wide difference as to the merits of various religions; I mean such merits, more especially, as come under the political consideration of a civil community; for while some systems of religion tend more or less to promote honesty, and preserve the public peace; others, for instance Popery, by I know not what species of superstition, priestcraft, and dispensing powers, tend as directly to frustrate the good intention of the laws, to pervert or nullify the power of the magistrates, and, in the end, to dissolve society. It therefore seems a thing evident to common sense, that as one sort of religion may greatly hurt, and another as considerably serve society, society ought to lend its countenance and encouragement to such principles of religion, and such only as are most likely to promote social virtue, and civil obedience. But to what degree of encouragement, on the one side, or discountenance, on the other, society may or ought to proceed, is a point which concerns us all thoroughly to consider; and on which, therefore, I beg leave to enter a little, promising to avoid prolixity as much as the nature of the subject will permit.

If a religion is to be chosen by the state, it must be by the supreme power. But if this power shall attempt to impose its own religious choice universally on all its members, it will thereby effectually frustrate all the ends and intentions of religion; because the force of religion on the conscience proceeds from the belief of its coming from God, and being derived from divine authority; which can never be the case, where it is manifestly imposed by the civil power. For though it were really and truly a divine revelation, yet if it came to those, who are not yet convinced of its truth, in the form of a statute or human law, it must expect a very cold reception. Our inward thoughts have a right to be free; and if the magistrate shall presume to exercise the same dominion over them that he does over our outward actions, they will give a strong resistance, as well when he imposes the belief of what is true, as that which is false.

Besides, if that, which should be derived from divine authority, be transferred and founded on mere human power, the people who are to receive it immediately from the hands of the magistrate, and who, generally speaking, can look no higher than the hand that is next, and delivers it immediately to themselves, will never embrace it instead of their old religion, which they believe to be from God. Civil power, therefore, can be no instrument of conversion.

A religion imposed by the magistrate might, indeed, be outwardly professed by some; but could only teach them falsehood and hypocrisy; so far would it be from inspiring them with that honesty and virtue which the well-being of society so necessarily requires.

All revealed religion is founded on faith: now faith can never be the matter or object of human law. There is no commanding one to believe. Such a usurpation on the mind, which can only believe on credibilities, would rather prevent and hinder belief; because it would immediately be supposed, that a religion, relying on such foreign helps, had no truth nor likelihood of its own to support it.

A system of religious principles, imposed by the magistrate, could, at least, have but the force and virtue of a human law; and, consequently, could never reach the conscience; could never guard the society from secret frauds;

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could never establish a court in the heart, sufficient to see justice done in times and places that are out of the reach of the civil court.

The use of religion to society, is, to support and enforce the laws by a higher law, a law of conscience. But this it can never do, if it is to borrow its own force and authority from those very human laws which it ought to back and fortify with the strength of an obligation superior to that with which they are imposed.

No power but that of the Divine can impose a religion. God, we see, distinguished between his own power and that of human laws, when he imposed the Christian. He supported it with miracles, which were the signs and credentials of his authority, which no civil power could counterfeit; nay, he planted and established his religion in direct opposition to all civil power. Thus only the mind can be convinced: thus only the conscience and the heart can be converted. As to the magistrate, or the legislature, they can only give the encouragement of the state to the professors of that religion they like best; and leave others to their own consciences or humours, without attempting either to entice or terrify them into a conformity with their establishment.

The civil magistrate, therefore, cannot impose a religion; and yet, if he establishes no religion, but leaves the power of the constitution to be shared by the professors of any religion, he will soon find the constitution destroyed by that which alone can preserve it: for,

The professors of each religion will either be zealous for it, or they will not; if they will not, then there is, in effect, no religion in the society. A religion merely professed, but neither preferred to other religions, nor zealously loved and adhered to, can have no influence on the lives of its professors; can neither make them honest, nor answer any ends of the society. Such a lukewarmness is next to infidelity; in which it must soon end, if some novelty in religion do not prevent it, and excite a new spirit. Nay, I will be bold to say, that, unless a man loves his religion more than riches, power, in short, than every thing in the world; unless he is more afraid of acting against its rules, than of offending the greatest man on earth, or all mankind; unless

it hath engaged and subdued all his affections, and attached to itself the whole force of all his passions; it can by no means make him a good member of society, although it is the only thing that can.

But if each religious system is zealously maintained, it must also be warmly contended for, by its adherents: for such is the nature of man, that, generally speaking, he cannot help thinking his disputing, or even fighting, for his religion, must be highly serviceable to it, and therefore his duty; and no doubt so it is, as often as the tongues, the pens, or the swords, of its adversaries happen to be employed against it. Contentions about religion, if they were confined to words only, would not much concern society. But this is not always the case. They frequently end in the most outrageous battles and bloodshed; for wars, commenced on religious differences, are always the most bitter and furious. The souls on each side are engaged, as well as the bodies; and the spirit of opposition is strained infinitely higher than when mere earthly possessions are contended for, by the imagination that the glory of God, and heaven itself, are at stake.

Now the society has no other way of guarding against the mischievous effects of these religious bickerings, and preventing its own ruin, but by restraining the civil power to the professors of one religion. By this means the rest, having no power, can give no disturbance; and lest they should be disturbed by the established party, such laws must be provided, as may not only secure to them their own possessions on the same footing with the rest of their fellow-subjects, but also effectually secure to them the free and peaceable exercise of those several religions their consciences have embraced. If this be not done, the power of the society, which ought by all means to be firmly and inseparably united, will be unavoidably divided, and divided too by such a cause of division, as will set it in the most direct and fierce opposition to itself. When religious differences tear the members of any society asunder, if the civil power be parcelled out among them, no civil expedient will be strong enough to keep them together.

If, to clear up the afore-mentioned difficulties, we would

trace the true bounds of civil power in relation to religious matters, we must do it by considering from whence that power is derived. It is derived from, and founded on, these two maxims. The society has a right to preserve itself, and the society has a right to choose a religion for itself.

If, according to the first, the society has a right to preserve itself, in the same manner with a single person, then it must of necessity have a right to lodge or trust its power only with such as will employ it in the service, and to the preservation of itself. No man would willingly give another power to destroy him, especially if he had any reason to suspect him capable of being tempted so to do. And why a nation or society should be excluded from the first law of nature, more than a single person, I cannot see.

Again; since a society has a right to preserve itself, and since religion is necessary to the preservation of society, it follows, that a society must have a right to choose some religion; because, if it has a right of self-preservation, it must have a right to the necessary means.

Now then, from these two maxims laid together, it appears, that the supreme legislative power in any society has a right to establish some one religion, and to trust its power in the hands of those only who profess and adhere to that religion.

But as there is no establishing religion without establishing the necessary means; so, therefore, the society must also have an undoubted right to settle and fix such means as it finds requisite to preserve that religion, on which its own preservation depends: such are the maintenance of persons to preach it; the decent ordering of ceremonies, and mere modes of worship; the building of public places of worship; the lending its power to suppress immoralities, and stubborn offenders, and the like.

But as a single person has only a right to preserve himself, and to the means of his own preservation, and not at all to annoy another; so neither has a society any other right. Once it hath chosen a religion for itself, and laid down ways and means for the support and security of it, it hath done all that it lawfully can. And if it shall persecute those who dissent from its established religion, for no other reason but

because they dissent, it is then guilty of usurping upon the conscience, over which neither God nor reason has permitted it to exercise any jurisdiction.

Now the society may be said to persecute for religion, when it exercises any severities upon dissenters, that are not necessary to its own preservation; that is, when it either deprives them of their lives, their liberties, or their possessions, merely because they differ from it in point of religion, when they are quiet, and offer no disturbance to the state.

But, on the other hand, if those who differ from the establishment in religious matters, shall attempt any thing against the state, though it be from a religious motive, the society, as it hath a right to preserve itself, must also have a right to treat them as rebels; and, according to the degree of their obstinacy, rather than be destroyed itself, to deprive them of their possessions, their liberties, or even their lives. This is not persecution, but self-preservation.

If dissenters from the established religion rebel, through a mistaken notion, that the principles and interests of their religion require it, then the society has a right to suppress them; but not to prohibit or persecute their religion, on which their rebellion cannot be justly chargeable.

But, if the true genius and spirit of their religion stirs them up to civil discord and rebellion, then the society has an undoubted right to prohibit and extirpate their religion itself, as contrary to the very laws of nature, and inconsistent with the preservation of the government.

The body politic has the same right with the natural, to remove every thing from itself that is hurtful and destructive to it; and this it hath from its natural right to preserve itself.

Upon the whole, the supreme power can expect no perfect obedience, nor can the state subsist in any tolerable manner, without religion. It is therefore the interest of every constitution to choose to itself some religion, to which it has as undoubted a right as any single person can have. States may be converted, may believe, may be called religious, as well as men. As the civil magistrate on the one hand, must not presume to impose a religion; so neither must he leave the constitution exposed to the ruinous effects of civil discord, by permitting vulgar diversity of opinion to

parcel out and divide the power of the state. He hath a right to keep that power, with which he is vested, together and entire: he hath also the same right to apply the necessary means for this purpose, which can never interfere with the conscience, nor with any lawful system of religion. But, if he proceeds farther, he is guilty of tyranny and usurpation.

It is our happiness to live under a constitution wherein the rules laid down in this Discourse for the political choice of a religion, have been exactly observed; nay, more, wherein the choice of the legislature hath happily fallen on that religion, which, of all others, is best fitted both to promote the salvation of its professors, and to bestow peace and happiness on the community. It hath shewn its wisdom, not only by its choice, but by the manner of securing to itself the many good effects of that choice. It hath, by the most wholesome laws, guarded the civil power from being divided by religious differences; and yet, with an unexampled lenity, hath afforded all who differ from the established religion more liberty of conscience than is enjoyed in any other country.

Were this duly considered by those who worship God according to the established religion, they would find reason to be more thankful to Providence than they generally are. Whence the infatuation proceeds, I will not invidiously attempt to determine; but true it is, that no people under the sun have more reason to be zealously affected towards their religion, than we; yet there neither is, nor ever was, a people so very regardless of their religion. On the other hand, were the nature of our establishment, in respect to religion, as impartially considered by those who dissent from that establishment as it ought to be, they would find more reason to rest satisfied with the truly Christian indulgence it affords them, than they seem at present to be sensible of.

May it not be reasonably expected, that they who sit at the helm, and see, better than others can do, the ill effects of being thus either becalmed, or tossed about by contrary winds, should use their utmost endeavours to rekindle in our minds a due regard for so excellent a religion, and to assuage that spirit of dissension and strife which formerly did so much mischief, and threatens us with more?

There are two kinds of men whom the state ought to discountenance, if it fears God, or loves his religion, or wishes for perpetuity and happiness to itself; I mean those who would talk us out of all religion; and those, who, on all occasions, are for new-modelling that we have. If the civil constitution hath a right to preserve itself, it hath a right to discourage such books as are written against that religion on which it subsists; for these, whether we consider them in the pernicious matter they contain, or in the base disingenuous artifice wherewith they are penned, can be regarded by a rational lover of his country only as so many masses of poison to the body politic.

It must also be equally the right and interest of the constitution to silence those little petulant talkers, whom we find in every corner prating and declaiming against that religion, which, by giving strength to the government and the laws, preserves us from the villanous designs of those wretches. Till these vermin, wherewith our country has swarmed of late, are utterly extirpated, there can be no rational hope of health. They can do no hurt among people of sound understandings, because they dabble only in the shallows of knowledge, and read no higher than is requisite for the paltry retail of libertinism among the ignorant and the vicious. But among these, who make up a huge body, they are absolute dictators, infallible oracles, and perfect libraries of learning.

It is almost as necessary to discountenance those who would innovate and new-model our religion. If religion is the work of God, its fundamentals are not to be changed for the satisfaction of every conceited and giddy-headed wretch, who can never be pleased with any thing whereof he was not himself the contriver. And, so far as its externals have taken their rise or authority from the public wisdom of the church and state, they are not to be laid aside for others that have nothing but ignorance, ill-humour, and prejudice, to recommend them. Yet their abettors urge them with a degree of zeal they seldom shew for their souls. In order to effect their designs, the lees of old parties, and the corrosive settlings of half-exploded disputes, are stirred up in the minds of a giddy people, by those who love to fish in troubled waters, because their hooks and nets can be the

better concealed. Never was there a constitution so subject to these religious and political fevers, which, as it hath not vigour enough to throw them off, fall heavily on its vitals, religion, loyalty, and common honesty. Unless the fashion of religion is changed as often as that of our clothes, we are presently out of humour with it. It is old; it is stale; it looks as if our ancestors had worn it quite out. Then we are all for cutting and modelling; and he who hath the best talent at new and whimsical inventions, is our most orthodox doctor, and our ablest politician.

And what benefit hath the community derived from the eternal changes, from the endless reformations, made among some, and artfully recommended to all? Why, in diversifying the form of religion, they have almost destroyed the substance; whereas that which they ought to have reformed, was the petulance and conceit of their own giddy minds.

Changes, it is true, are always to be wished for, when there is reasonable hope of putting matters on a better footing. But to love changes, merely for the sake of novelty, is a despicable humour; and to push for them, in obedience to party-prejudice, is a very dangerous practice. On these, when once become rampant, if designing persons or factions should happen to lay hold, to forward their own private ends, there is no foreseeing what mischiefs may attend the innovation, during the struggle to bring it about; nor how deep, how general, how dangerous, a discontent may arise out of it, after it is brought to bear. The persons, who most eagerly wished for it, may happen not to find their account in it; and they who did not, are never likely to be reconciled to it.

On the whole, it is the duty, it is the interest, of every one in authority, to shew his love for the country he belongs to, by using all his influence to promote the credit of religion, the parent of sobriety, industry, liberty, justice, and all the public virtues; and to suppress infidelity, the source of all wickedness, of private misery, and public calamity.

If some of those who preside over us shall continue, as they have for some time done, to neglect this duty; nay, to act a part directly contrary to it, to make a jest of religion, both in their discourse and actions, and to encourage every upstart innovation therein; they ought to know, that such

a proceeding is the sure way to make slaves and beggars of their posterity; because it is the sure way to undo that country, in which, unhappily for others,they now bear their foolish heads so high. Hence it is, that irreligion prevails so much among the lower ranks of people. Hence it is, that the vulgar hardly think of any other power, than that of the next little man who is over them; that oaths of office are forgotten as soon as sworn; that oaths of evidence are bought, sold, and used, like any other tools; and that, 'because of swearing, the land mourneth' under rapine, injustice, and oppression. It would be happy for us, 'if every man did that which is right in his own eyes, as if we had no king;' but they do that which in their own consciences they know to be wrong, as if they had no God. If these things do not, as they unavoidably must, ruin our country of themselves, yet shall not he, to whom all power and authority over all the nations of the earth belongeth, 'visit for these things? Shall not his soul be avenged on such a nation as this? Though the Lord hath instructed it, and though he hath kept it as the apple of his eye; though, as an eagle stirreth upon her nest, fluttereth over her young ones, spreadeth out her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead it; though it hath been as the signet on his right hand,' yet, if it continues thus to treat Him, and his religion, 'he will pluck it thence, and give it into the hands of them that seek its destruction; he will set his face against it for evil, and not for good. That which he hath built, will he break down; and that which he hath planted, will he pluck up; even this whole land.' He who so often fought for it when it sought and served him, shall himself fight against it with an outstretched arm, with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath, if his displeasure is not averted by a speedy return to his service.

And now to the infinitely wise, just, and powerful God, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, ascribed, as they do of right belong, now, and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XX.

THE MARKS OF DANGEROUS CORRUPTION FOUND IN THE CHURCH OF ROME.

1 St. John iv. 1.

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Although the holy Evangelist levels this caution against those early heretics, who denied that 'Christ was come in the flesh,' yet, as he couches it in general terms, it is of universal use to all Christians, in times like these we live in, when there is such a variety, not only of teachers, but of churches, maintaining principles too opposite to one another to be all right and sound, and often of too much consequence in themselves, to be either received or rejected, without the utmost care and circumspection. We may safely venture to say, it was never more necessary than at present, 'to try the spirits' of all who undertake to teach others, 'whether they be of God or not.' I need not, in proof of this, tell you, who know it as well as I do, how many different kinds of professions, or persuasions, of teachers, of churches, there are now in the Christian world, nor on what important, nay, fundamental, articles of doctrine they oppose one another. But it is worth while to remind you, that unless you duly lay to heart the admonition in my text, you are in danger of being seduced from the faith, of falling from that virtue and goodness which is the end of true religion, and of thereby making shipwreck of your souls.

But here you will naturally ask, how the spirits are to be tried? By what signs those teachers, or churches, that either artfully insinuate, or arbitrarily presume to impose, false doctrines, may be distinguished from such as inculcate the truth, and nothing but the truth? In regard to the passions and prejudices of mankind, which have always been too busy in matters of religion, it is indeed no easy task to assign the marks whereby this distinction may be made; because every

man is too apt to take that for a sign of truth, which having been long connected in his mind with his old opinions, speaks the pleasing language of his heart. But to the eye of unprejudiced reason, and of common sense, to which alone the Author of truth, as such, addresses himself, in his word, the signs by which this important distinction may be made, are there too evidently declared, to be mistaken. All we are to believe and do, is, with the utmost plainness, set forth in holy Scripture; and besides, the genuine characters, both of the true and false teachers, are therein made as clear and glaring as we can desire.

Cardinal Bellarmine, that most distinguished champion of the church of Rome, hath given us fifteen notes or marks, which he takes to be those of the true church, and whereby he endeavours to prove that his own, and no other, is that very church. He observes, very justly, that such marks as serve for this distinction, ought, with full and sufficient notoriety, to be found in the true church, and in that alone. Unhappily for him and his cause, some of his marks are not to be found in any church; many of them not in his; some of them are not marks either of a true or false church; and others, while they are manifestly wanting in his, are as manifestly found in such as he condemns of heresy. These things have been fully made out against him, by the answers of our Protestant divines.

His method, however, is good; and he fails only in the application and execution, which, as it cannot be ascribed to his want of talents, must, we may presume, have been owing purely to the badness of the cause he espoused. Give me leave, in pursuance of his method, to point out the signs of a corrupt church, or a church so exceedingly depraved, that he who communicates with it, must, by so doing, endanger the salvation of his soul; and to shew that these signs are found in the church of Rome. In doing this, I shall proceed on fair reasons, and unsophisticated Scriptures; so that he who contradicts me, shall be forced to contradict the common sense of mankind, and the word of God.

Let the first sign of such a church be this, that it opposes sense and reason, and makes it impossible for any man sincerely to communicate with it, who is not ready to believe

and, in consequence of his belief, to act, directly against the testimony of those senses God hath given him, as the only inlets, and that reason bestowed on him, as the only test, of all his knowledge. That church must certainly be a very depraved one, which, in any instance, degrades its members, not only below the rank of human creatures, by prohibiting the use of their reason, but even below that of brutes, by obliging them to disbelieve their very senses, and that in pain of damnation. God, who knows we can receive no possible evidence of revelation, but through sense and reason, could never have intended to try our faith, by a flat contradiction to both. The source of truth and goodness knows we can have no apprehension of any revelation, but by our senses, nor judge of its meaning, but by our reason; and therefore cannot be supposed to have required of us the belief of any thing, as revealed by him, which those senses, and that reason, pronounce, and must invariably pronounce, impossible. It would be as needless to enlarge on the proof of this, as on that of his goodness, or any other attribute essential to him. It is enough, it is even more than enough, to observe, that, throughout his word, he deals with us according to the perceptions and faculties he hath given us. He condescends to prove the points he would have us believe, by miracles wrought before our eyes. Christ, in order to satisfy John of his mission, said to the messengers, 'Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up.' In delivering his doctrines, he appeals to our senses; 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear;' and upbraiding his hearers, who knew the signs of the weather, for not distinguishing the much more evident and certain signs of his coming, he calls them to the use of their own reason; 'Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?'

Notwithstanding all this, the church of Rome hath made it a part of her creed, and denounces damnation against every one who cannot believe it, that the bread and wine in the Eucharist are transubstantiated into that very flesh and blood of Christ which hung on the cross, and are now in heaven, although our senses tell us, as clearly as they do any thing else, that these elements are still real bread

and wine. We should be the less surprised at this their literal interpretation of our Saviour's words, did they not put a figurative construction on numberless other parts of Scripture, and even on many that are purely historical. But they say, though the substance is changed, the accidents remain the same; and we say, that we know nothing of bodies, but their accidents; that seeing is believing at least; that all bodies are limited; that no body can be in two distant places at once; and that we are sure, were what they maintain ever so true, God could not have made the belief of it a duty necessary to our eternal salvation; because the distinction between the substances and accidents of bodies, is a thing that cannot be made good by the greatest philosophers, nor at all apprehended by the bulk of mankind. But though this distinction were both intelligible and demonstrable, yet as bread, wine, flesh, and blood, are objects of our senses, the senses here, if any where, have a right to give testimony; and, to our senses, the elements in the Eucharist, after, as well as before consecration, are truly bread and wine. If therefore our senses are not to be trusted in this their proper and immediate province, they are not to be trusted at all; and consequently, the thorough-paced Papist is reduced to the condition of a senseless block, of which those who have thus metamorphosed him may make what use they please, may either canonize him for a saint, or set him up for a god, or make a stool of him, to seat themselves at ease on.

In numberless other instances, this church presumes to interdict the use of reason, as severely as she does that of the senses in this. It is the characteristic merit of a Papist, to believe, against his natural judgment, whatsoever his unerring church, or rather its infallible head, shall dictate. In times of ignorance and superstition, this church was corrupted with infinite errors, both in faith and practice, which she, being too much attached to at the reformation, to give up, defended herself with high pretensions to infallibility. If she had taught her children to believe in purgatory, to trust in indulgences, to be content with a mutilated Eucharist, to pray to creatures, and to fall down before graven images; all this, and a great deal more, directly contrary to the reason of every one, who could read the Scriptures, must

be right; because she could not be in the wrong. But how shall we know, that a church enjoining the belief and practice of such things is infallible? If neither our senses nor our reason are to be trusted in matters so naturally obvious to both, we are incapable of knowing any thing, and consequently can know nothing of her infallibility; for belief of any kind must have some appearance, at least, of sense or reason to build on; and therefore, as we are but mere stocks and stones, it is ridiculous in her to expect we should believe any thing. If, to draw us in, she allows us but the smallest use of either, we shall presently see, by the injunctions just now mentioned, that she is far enough from infallibility. How can popery make a convert? Surely she will not presume to reason with him, in order to his conversion; or if she does, how will he like it, to be reasoned as far as the church door, and then to be stripped of his rationality, that he may the better digest what he finds within? Need I say more to prove this church deceived herself, and a deceiver of all who communicate with her, to men who are determined to use the senses of an animal, and the reason of a rational animal? Whether it is necessary or not, I will go farther.

Let the second note, or mark, of a corrupt church be this, that she enjoins things contrary to the express injunctions of holy Scripture. I must ask you here, whether you expect I should prove this to be the infallible mark of a corrupt church? Can that church possibly be a true and pure one, that bids us do what God peremptorily forbids, or prohibits that which he commands? Will the infallibility of the church do on this occasion, wherein it is opposed directly to the infallibility of God? If we have not been beat out of our reason, it will answer, no. With great modesty, surely, may it venture on that negative, for which it neither hath, nor can have, any other alternative, than downright blasphemy.

But wherein does the church of Rome thus directly countermand the orders of Almighty God? Why, God says, 'Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, or the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth; thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them:' and the church of Rome says, Thou shalt bow down to graven images

and worship them. God says of the cup in the Eucharist, 'Drink ye all of this:' and the church of Rome says, Ye shall not all drink of this. God says, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve:' and the church of Rome says, Thou shalt worship the Virgin Mary; thou shalt also pray to her, and serve her. Many other instances, as strongly contradictory as these, though perhaps not altogether so obvious, might be assigned; but one may be sufficient: for what church shall dare to oppose the will of God? It is but an aggravation of the presumption, to say, he authorizes us thus to contradict himself.

But, on this head, the church of Rome defends herself, not only with her infallibility, but with her oral traditions. She says, God's word is twofold, either written or unwritten. She says also, that both were committed to her keeping, and subjected to her construction. The oral traditions she calls the unwritten word, and by them interprets that which is written. When the Protestants urge her with the Scriptures, she erects her own corrupt customs into traditions, and would have the Scriptures bend to these. It happens unluckily for her, that from the writings of the fathers, which is tradition on record, and to which therefore we allow its proper weight, we can shew in what remote ages, from the apostolic times, her corrupt customs were introduced. Now, we ask, whether the traditions that authorize these customs lay dormant from the days of the apostles, until the introduction of the said customs? Whether it was lawful to commit these traditions to writing, or not? Why, if it was, the fathers of the earlier ages do not mention them in their works? Why, if it was not lawful, the Romish writers have ventured to insert them in theirs? As they are used for a check, to say no worse, on the word of God, we ought to be very scrupulous about their genuineness and authority. We therefore farther ask, whether, as it always happens in things transmitted by word of mouth, through so many reporters, these traditions, supposing they could have had a real apostolical original, may not have been enlarged, mutilated, or corrupted, in a course of so many years, and in passing through so many hands, whereof those in later ages have given us so much reason to suspect their integrity? For our parts, we think a stream may as well

be supposed to run through a hundred dunghills, and come out pure and limpid from the last. But when they happen, as in respect to image-worship, and many other points, flatly to contradict the express appointment of God, there is then no longer room for suspicion; we are sure they could not have flowed from the Spirit of God; and we say to their vouchers, as Christ did to the Pharisees, 'Ye have made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.' We add also, you have left out the particular commandment here hinted at, in many of your manuals, published for vulgar use, and divided the tenth into two, that the ignorant may not perceive they are robbed of one. Is not this a gross and impudent cheat? What ought we to think of a church that dares to juggle thus with the commands of God, and the souls of men?

Let the third mark of a corrupt church be this, that she is idolatrous; that is, that she both prescribes and practices the worship of creatures. We may amuse ourselves as long as we please with idle distinctions about degrees of worship. The worship so severely prohibited in Scripture, and by all true religion, is prayer to, and dependance on, an absent creature. Either this is idolatry, or there can be no such thing. When either on common occasions, or in our extraordinary distresses, we kneel down, and offer up our prayers to any being, whom we believe in heaven, we attribute to that being the omnipresence or omniscience of God; we love and trust in that being, as more ready and able to help us than any other, or why should we thus address ourselves to him? It is ridiculous to plead humility, when we thus apply to an absent creature, not only because he may happen not to hear us, but because we know God is infinitely condescending to the addresses of his creatures; or why do we ever presume to pray immediately to him? Because we know he hath commanded us to pray directly to himself; and also because we know, that, so far as we stand in need of a mediator, we have one at the right hand of God, who hath already shewn us infinitely greater marks of his condescension and readiness to help us, than that of attending to our prayers.

Having shewn that praying to absent creatures is idolatry, we ought also to observe, that idolatry is a damnable

sin, and represented to us as such, both by reason and Scripture. Does not reason and common sense tell us, that, since there is but one God, he alone ought to be worshipped, and prayed to? The love and dependance of an intelligent creature are not to be alienated from its Maker, without an infinite offence to the former, and an equal loss to the latter. But when creatures become, in any degree, the objects of our worship, in the same degree are our hearts estranged and turned aside from God; and turned aside to what? Why, to beings as little able to help themselves as we are; to beings, whose happiness, whose very subsistence, results from perpetual acts of worship paid to God, on their own account. Does not the infinitely gracious Being, in condescending to make, to teach, to redeem, to comfort us, call up our affections and dependance to himself, and sufficiently encourage our continual addresses? Nay, does he not evidently appear, by all his dealings with us, earnestly to court our love, in a manner infinitely more tender, and more engaging, than that of our fellow-creatures, who cannot be happy without it? And does he not, in his word, represent himself as a husband jealous of our affections on this very subject of his worship? How often does he peremptorily forbid us to have any other object of adoration but himself; awfully inculcating his justice, his power, his majesty, that we may fear him; pathetically pleading his mercy and bounty, that we may love him; and strongly assuring us of his truth and faithfulness, that we may depend upon him? Shall we, thus solicited by the infinite Being himself, foolishly and impiously solicit any other? No, my brethren; let us, from our very souls, detest the most distant thought of so enormous a practice; and look, with a mixture of horror and pity, on that church which prescribes it, as abandoned to a most unhappy infatuation. Fly far from her, you whom God, in mercy to your souls, hath already taught to see her danger. And you, who have been unhappily educated in her communion, hear his voice, who cries from heaven, saying, 'Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues; for her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.'

Let the fourth mark of a corrupt church be this, that she

still pretends to the power of working miracles, in confirmation of such doctrines and practices as those I have mentioned, although every rational creature sees she is wholly destitute of that power, and, instead of miracles, only palms on the undiscerning a miserable legerdemain of pranks, so impudent in the performance, and so impious in the application, that she is in the right to extinguish the sense and reason of her votaries, before she attempts to feed their credulity with such a juggle. God was pleased to make use of miracles, truly such, as the best, or, I should rather say, as the only satisfactory proofs of divine revelation. But as real miracles give the highest attestation to the mission of the worker, so, of all things, a pretended miracle detected, is the most apt to throw the imputation of falsity on the cause that employs it; first, Because it amounts, in fact, to a confession, that the want of other proofs makes this necessary; and, secondly, Because there is no believing men, who presume to deal between God and the world, by a method so impiously disingenuous. He that offers any other kind of proof may think it valid, and therefore, it is not demonstration that he intends to deceive; but, in this kind, every man must know, before he begins, whether he is going to work a real miracle, or to belie the source of all wisdom and power, by a detestable piece of villany, than which, if he should chance to be found out, no one thing in the world can more effectually bring suspicion on real miracles, or so deeply wound the true religion. It follows, therefore, that the worker of a pretended miracle must be considered as a man of no religion, as a most atheistical deceiver. It is true, indeed, that a very wrong-headed man, through an unaccountable species of zeal, or a wrong-hearted one, for some by-ends of his own, may attempt to impose on the superstitious by such a practice, even in favour of the truth. But we are not here speaking of madmen; neither is it our intention to represent any church or cause, as responsible for the unauthorized conduct of fools and knaves. But we insist, that every church, setting herself forth as empowered to work miracles, when she knows she is not, is a fallacious church, and must be held responsible for all the juggling pranks of her party. Now, the heads of a church cannot possibly be ignorant, whether they are intrusted with the

miraculous powers or not; and therefore, if, knowing their own inability herein, they actually set up for these powers, they are infinitely worse than a gang of banditti; because they attempt to spoil us of somewhat, in comparison of which our worldly possessions are nothing, and that not without a design on our purses, as well as our minds; they rob on the road to heaven, and commit the vilest sort of crime in the name of God. A sanctified impostor, a holy villain, are, of all others, the most detestable appellations; and he that deserves them may dispute precedency with the grand deceiver.

But can it be possible that this most enormous crime is chargeable on any church presuming to call itself by the name of Christ? Yes; the church of Rome universally lays claim to the power of working miracles; and cardinal Bellarmine makes it the eleventh note, whereby that church may be proved to be the true church. But the frequent detection of her miracles, in almost every country of Europe, hath thoroughly exposed her claim to the ridicule even of the more rational Papists, if such men may be called rational, who can continue to communicate with a church so palpably convinced of this impious fraud. If these miracles are real, why are they wrought only in popish countries, and before a mob of bigots, who do not need such food for their credulity? Why not here among us heretics, who cannot be converted to popery, without more and greater miracles, than were exhibited in proof of Christianity? But, I suppose, our adherence to sense and reason hath rendered us unworthy of this glorious dispensation. Well, if it is so, we even put up with it; and, having the use of our senses, must be contented without the Virgin's milk, and of our reason, without the blood of Januarius. Besides, we have the less reason to regret the want of these modern miracles, since we took the liberty to read the Scriptures; for there we find our blessed Saviour, and his apostles, made these very miracles the signs of heresy and imposture. 'False Christs,' says our Saviour, 'and false prophets, shall arise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.' 'Then,' that is, in the latter times, saith St. Paul, 'shall that wicked one be revealed—even he whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power

and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceiveableness of unrighteousness, in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.' And who prompts these false teachers to recommend their pernicious doctrines with pretended miracles? St. John tells us, he saw these prompters; namely, 'three unclean spirits, like frogs, coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet; for they are the spirits of devils, working miracles.' Thus we see what epithet is due to that church, which, pretending to miracles, hath been publicly convicted of imposture, in numberless instances.

Let the fifth mark of a corrupt church be this, that, either by her principles or ordinances, she encourages her members to sin. It is the grand end of true religion, to reform the lives of men, in order to their happiness, both temporal and eternal. The religion that inculcates such principles and motives, as strongly tend to this blessed effect, gives the highest proof of its truth that can be possibly proposed within the verge of nature. On the other hand, that church or religion, which gives men hopes of compounding with God for happiness, on any other conditions than those of real piety and goodness, gives as clear proofs of her own falsity, as can be drawn from the nature of things, in any branch of knowledge. Was it not the main end of our religion, to 'call us to repentance, and newness of life?' Can he enter into the kingdom of God, who is not reduced to true Christian simplicity, and the harmless disposition of a child? Our religion was not given us to licence sin, but, so far as human infirmity will permit, wholly to remove it. And so far as sinless perfection is impossible, to provide an atonement for the effects of those weaknesses we cannot entirely get the better of; and this only on the terms of sincere repentance, and the utmost endeavours to amend. Christ our Saviour 'gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. We are therefore not to walk after the flesh, but the Spirit. 'Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders,

drunkenness, revellings, and such-like.' The Holy Ghost assures us, that 'such as do these things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance;' and, in a word, the virtues opposite to all those vices just now enumerated. 'They that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts;' knowing 'that if they live after the flesh, they shall die; but if they, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, they shall live: for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they,' and they only, 'are the sons of God.' God hath told us what he requires of us, and what is true religion: 'What doth God require of thee, O man, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.' The church that teaches us to hope for salvation on these and such-like terms, deals faithfully between God and us; but that church which explains away these terms, as the Jesuits do, and, by its dispensations and indulgences, offers hopes of happiness to the unreformed, as the pope and the church of Rome at large do, defeats the very end proposed of true religion.

The church of Rome in vain apologizes for this practice, by saying, she grants her indulgences only for venial sins, and thereby relaxes the temporal punishment due to them in another life. Who told her there are temporal punishments for sins in a future life? Plato did; but the Scriptures say no such thing. They call us to repentance in this life, and say not a word of pugative torments hereafter. Nor do they any where distinguish between pardonable and unpardonable sins, but in relation to the sin against the Holy Ghost. All sins but that are there represented as pardonable, on the terms of faith and repentance before we die; and all sins are unpardonable, in such as do not believe and repent, on this side the grave. Christianity gives no encouragement to the committal of any sin; not only because, 'whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all;' but because the author of that holy religion knew, that the committal of such sins, as the church of Rome calls small or venial sins, is in itself, a great and

heinous sin, and naturally leads to the committal of greater. To give an instance, wanton liberties lead to fornication, and fornication to adultery. But our Saviour, to cut short all impertinent distinctions in vices of this kind, says, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that looketh on a woman so as to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.' And is not a progress from less to greater in other vices, as bad as in this? If we doubt whether maiming and murder are not as well guarded against, by the prohibition of anger and malice, as adultery is, by that of wanton desires, we may hear what Christ denounces against him who calls his brother or neighbour a fool. The case is the same in every kind of sin, whether expressly so ruled in Scripture, or not; because the reason is the same, and the prohibition of sin is preremptorily and awfully delivered, in universal terms. 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men,' particularly of such men 'as hold the truth in unrighteousness.' But why do we stay on this distinction between mortal and venial sins? Are not assassinations, poisonings, massacres, mortal sins? If they are, what shall we think of that church, which encouraged her sons to butcher so many of the Protestants, in cold blood, throughout all the nations of Europe, but more particularly in Savoy, France, and Ireland; and three of her priests to stab two kings of France, and to destroy an emperor by a poisoned wafer, which the giver believed to be the very body of Christ? This is infinitely more than making small sins venial; it is rendering the most atrocious crimes meritorious. If heaven may thus be obtained, who can be so impious, so enormously wicked, as to dread the torments of hell? Is this the only religion, the only church of Christ, and yet teaches such things as these?

This naturally leads me to a sixth mark, or sign, of a corrupt church; namely, a cruel and persecuting spirit. Is there any necessity to prove, that such a spirit is not the spirit of the meek, the merciful, the forgiving Jesus? that the genius of his religion is wholly opposite to it; or that after what I have said already, the church of Rome hath given too evident, and too shocking proofs of a persecuting spirit? On a supposition, that we are all heretics, odious in the sight of God, for not renouncing our senses, and our

reason; for not directly violating both his first and second commandment; for not praying to our fellow creatures; for neither pretending to miraculous powers, nor believing in them that do; and for not trusting our salvation to posthumous purgations, or venial tickets from a blank of supererogatory merit; the fire, the fagot, and the sword, ought not surely to be employed against us, on these accounts. Can they convince us of our errors? Are the debates of Christians to be determined by weapons, instead of arguments; by force, instead of reason? Either we comply through fear, in which case we deserve not admittance into any society made up of honest men; or we stand out, or boldly face the fire; in which case, we give the highest reputation, and through that the greatest prospect of success, to the erroneous clause we declare for. But were it possible that Christianity could be served by blood and slaughter, Christianity itself forbids the use of such means; for it tells us, we are not to do evil, that good may come of it; nay, it even reproved the first bishop of Rome, for drawing his sword in defence of its Author, and his Master. How can the successors of that bishop, like him only in a readiness to brandish the bloody weapon, forget both the precept and example of Christ, on that occasion; who, to rebate the mistaken zeal of his apostle, bid him put up his sword; assuring him, that all such as had recourse to the sword, should perish by the sword; and then healed the wound made with it, in the flesh of him who came to seize his person? Are they not afraid of converting these words to St. Peter, into a prophecy concerning themselves, by calling in the sword, which may happen to be employed against them, as well as for them? Our Saviour, one should think, hath on another occasion, laid an eternal bar against the employing the terrors of compulsion and persecution in his service. James and John were for calling down fire from heaven on the Samaritan village, that did not receive him; but 'he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.' Never was persecution on the side of truth so justifiable as at that time. Notwithstanding all the prophecies and miracles that proved the mission of our Saviour, he was, in his own person, despised, and his religion rejected; yet, he who could have

dethroned Herod, arraigned the high-priest and sanhedrim, and crucified Pilate, chose to be on the suffering side, rather than employ his power in forcing the assent, or compliance of any man. Are they the followers or representatives of Christ, whose cruelty is thus glaringly condemned, both by his words and actions? As there is no one crime which natural humanity, and our holy religion so thoroughly detest, as bloodshed and murder, so no church can, by any other mark, more evidently prove itself an adversary to Christ, and Christianity, than by the scarlet colour left on it, after a scene of persecution and slaughter. Whether it is in this kind of red ink that the mark of the beast, that persecuted the woman and her seed, is written on the foreheads, or right hands of his followers, I leave the sacred critics to judge; but the conjecture seems highly probable.

Let the last mark of a corrupt church be this, that she forbids the free use of the Scriptures. If God hath been pleased to write his mind to mankind, who shall dare to stop the way between his pen and their eyes? Since he knows infinitely better how to speak to the understandings and hearts of his hearers than men do, and can speak with authority, surely he should be heard. He who made the tongue, shall he not speak? he who made the ear, shall he not be listened unto? Although, as the talents of men are different, one man may understand him better than another, and more clearly explain his meaning, yet how shall the less knowing judge, whether it is his meaning or not, if they are not permitted to see his words? Is no part of his word intelligible to the capacities of the illiterate? If any part of it is, why the whole shut up? Hath he himself any where said, that the learned only shall read the Scriptures? No; on the contrary, all sorts of people are expressly commanded to read and meditate on the law, and to teach their children therein. They who do this are pronounced happy, in the first Psalm. Nay, he is said to be blessed, that readeth and heareth even the deep and mysterious revelation of St. John; and all this without any distinction, or exception, in regard to the unlearned. 'Seek ye out,' saith Isaiah, 'the book of the Lord, and read.' 'Search the Scriptures,' saith our Saviour, 'for in them ye think ye have eternal life.' Here the ignorant are not excepted; and good reason, for they stand

most in need of God's instructions. The Bereans at large are commended 'for daily reading and searching the Scriptures, whether those things' which the apostles taught, and proved by miracles, 'were so,' as they set them forth, or not. St. Paul calls on the Ephesians at large also, to 'judge of his knowledge in the mystery of Christ, by the dispensation of the grace of God given to him for their edification.' He likewise desires them all, laity as well as clergy, ignorant as well as knowing, to 'take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,' no less than 'the shield of faith,' and the other parts of the sacred armour. He orders his Epistle to the Colossians to be read publicly in their church, or congregation, and then in that of the Laodiceans. He says also, in his first Epistle to the Thessalonians, 'I charge you, by the Lord, that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.' The same apostle sets it down, as highly to the honour of Timothy, 'that from a child he had known the holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.' And who were his guides and assistants in this great and necessary work? Not a learned priest, or scribe; not his father who was a Greek, and probably a Pagan, at least when Timothy was a child; but his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice, whose faith is commended as the source of his. Here is a person commended for reading the Scriptures in his childhood, under the instructions of two women, who must have read the sacred books themselves, or they could not have taught him to do it. The Ethiopian eunuch, who was but a neophyte, or new proselyte, was so intent on the Scriptures, that 'he read them by the way in his chariot,' though he did not understand the passage he studied. But God was so well pleased with what he did, that he brought Philip to instruct and baptize him; and so blessed the well-meant, though weak endeavours of this devout person, as to make them the occasion of conversion to a whole nation. Apollos, who was a man eloquent, and mighty in the Scriptures, having been already tinctured with Christianity, had the 'way of God more perfectly expounded to him by Aquila, and his wife Priscilla,' two tent-makers; which could not possibly have been done by these trades-people, had they not been first well versed in the Scriptures themselves. Here

we see it was the will of God that all should read his word, and that all did read it, at a time when they had inspired teachers, and consequently were under infinitely less necessity of depending on the written word, than the same sort of people are now-a-days, when, God knows, their teachers of all sorts are far enough from infallibility.

It is with a great deal more of policy than of either honesty or piety, that the church of Rome forbids the laity, unless licenced, to read the Scriptures; because, if such a liberty were allowed and taken, all the marks of corruption and imposture charged in this discourse on that church, together with many others, must be found condemned therein as such, and a wide door thereby thrown open for the reformation.

But that church says, it is not with any apprehension of such effects, that she locks up the Scriptures; but to prevent the infinite errors, and wild or wicked extravagances, arising from a promiscuous perusal of those books among the ignorant. We confess the vulgar perusal of the sacred writings hath been, and still may be attended with this mischief; but we insist that the common people are not a whit more apt to extract the poison of heresy and schism from the wholesome flowers of God's word, than the learned, who, in all ages of the church, have been the chief broachers and abettors of pestilent opinions. It is in the writings of polemical divines and commentators, that we find the Scriptures most shamefully wrested, and forced to speak a language foreign to the intention of their author. Besides, while the vulgar are under the greatest difficulties in propagating their mistakes, the learned and the eloquent can spread theirs, as far as the fame of their great abilities is extended. It follows, therefore, that if the word of God is to be shut against the common people, because they may mistake its meaning in some places, while they profit infinitely by it in others, it ought, for a stronger reason, to be shut also against the learned; who, if they are less apt to mistake, are however, incomparably more disposed to pervert its meaning, in order to serve the purposes of a party, to enhance the credit of their learning, by victories won in the field of controversy, and to coin new systems of religion accommodated to their luxuriant fancies and affections. If

the illiterate ought not to read the gospel, neither ought they to hear it preached; for sure I am, it is much safer for the people to hear God speak in his own words, than to hear those who, in these times at least, pretend to speak for him. We may, I think, without a breach of modesty, insist, that one who can only read, will be in much greater danger of being misled by an ordinary sermon, than by a chapter of the Bible.

But, to cut all this short, which is but human reasoning at the best, and therefore may be precarious and undecisive, God, as I have shewn, hath commanded all men to read his word; from whence it follows, that whatsoever church forbids it, high as her claim of infallibility may be carried, she proves herself, by so doing, not only erroneous, but impious, and ought to be answered in the words of Peter, and the other apostles, 'we ought to obey God rather than men.' Shall God order our light, such as it is, to shine before men, and suffer his own, from which alone ours can be borrowed, to be put under a bushel? What can men mean by keeping the word of God, and the office whereby they publicly worship him, in an unknown tongue, if it is not, lest, in case both were understood, the former should condemn the latter too palpably, to escape the notice of the most illiterate? And, to say no more on this head, what shall the most ignorant and bigotted members of a church do, as to the duty of conforming with her, or dissenting from her, when they see her compelled to such expedients? Why, she tells them, they must be damned, if they do not absolutely renounce, to all religious intents and purposes, the uninfluenced use of their own sense and reason and of the word of God. And to what end, but that they may, against the express commands of God, pray to creatures; fall down before graven images; believe that bread is flesh and wine blood; believe that every paltry trick is a miracle; that venal indulgences may serve for righteousness or repentance; and that the just and gracious God will reward them with the joys of heaven for cutting the throats of their neighbours, and burning their fellow-creatures alive, merely because they cannot agree with them in thinking all this mass of absurdity wisdom; and this scene of cruelty a service acceptable to the

God of all mercies? Can they possibly believe their salvation depends on a faith like this?

No; none but the most stupid or abandoned among them have recourse to hopes so strangely founded. There are millions of sensible and worthy men in that communion, who have indeed a mere speculative faith in these things, or rather think they believe them, though in reality they do not, as is manifest from the goodness of their lives, whereby it appears, that they lay little or no stress on them. There are also many of them, who, like Erasmus, Cassander, and father Paul, have knowledge enough to see the folly, and goodness enough to detest the wickedness, of such principles; and yet judge it better to continue as they are, than to break with a church, wherein, notwithstanding their objections to her, they think they may be saved. You see these men going to mass, you see them on their knees before a crucifix, or an image of the blessed Virgin; you ask them, whether they think it possible for one, who dies in a great measure impenitent and unreformed, to be saved by the help of posthumous masses; or whether the commands of the pope and the church can sanctify the private murder, or public massacre, of Protestants; and they answer, perhaps, with their church, they believe they may. But, if you consider them in their lives and conversations, you will find this was all pure speculation, which they dare by no means, nor in any measure, trust to; for the men live as if they thought it impossible to be saved, without a good life, or a thorough reformation. And such is their innate humanity, and truly Christian charity, that ten thousand commands of the pope and church could not prevail on them to stain their hands in blood. This they owe to natural good dispositions, and the sounder principles of their religion. They swallow their religion as a healthy man does food, consisting of wholesome and noxious ingredients, too indiscriminately, but so however, as to be nourished by that which is good, and to pass off that which is bad without taking it into the habit. Quite contrary is the effect in a mind naturally unsound, or predisposed to superstition and vice. In this the wholesome food goes off undigested, while the mental poison, entering the circulation of thought and opinion, corrupts and assimilates the affections to itself.

In this I represent the church of Rome without prejudice. She was, for three centuries and a half, the glory of all churches. She even yet retains the belief of one God, in a trinity of person. She believes in the satisfaction made for the sins of men by the death of Christ. She trusts in the assistances of God's Holy Spirit. She regards the sanctions of the Christian law as eternal. In these things she seems to have an immense advantage over many, who call themselves Protestants and Christians. But how miserably does she defeat her own sounder principles, by adopting others, in a great measure, subversive of these! She believes in one God; but she worships creatures and images. She trusts in the merits and intercessions of Christ; but she enfeebles and dishonours this dependance, by trusting in the merits and intercessions of saints. She relies on the grace of the Holy Ghost; but leans also on her own strength, and boasts a sort of independent holiness. She believes in the eternity of future rewards and punishments; but subverts the effects of her own hopes and fears in futurity, by an illusory prospect of reformation in another world, by works of supererogation and indulgences. Thus she adheres to the true religion in speculation; but in practice destroys its power. Besides, she turns devotion into superstition, and buries the spirit of Christian piety under such a load of human ordinances, or rather Pagan ceremonies, that the ordinances of Christ can hardly be found in the motley heap. When we look at her, we see little else than an ostentatious pageant of outward pomp and power, of human inventions, and of human 'traditions, which render the commandments of God of none effect.' And, that all her corruptions may become incurable, she looks on herself as infallible. But whether she brings as strong proofs to support her title to this high attribute, as I have alleged to evince the contrary, let the knowing and the candid judge. Her direct opposition to the word of God hath been here so glaringly made out, by seven flagrant instances, that either that word, or she, must stand convicted of error. And as the arguments I have used have nothing subtle or evasive in them, so they cannot be refuted by subtleties or evasions. Common sense can sufficiently judge of them, and can judge but one way of them.

To conclude now, let us of this truly reformed church, with hearts full of gratitude, bless the good God for the wisdom and resolution of those holy men and martyrs, whom he sent to bring us into the glorious liberty and light of his gospel. Perhaps had we been born and bred up under the influence of bad principles, and a corrupt church, we should not have had sense and resolution enough, either to cut out so good a system for ourselves, or to come over to this, had it been prepared to our hands. And let us, in the next place, in a spirit of true Christian charity, pitying our brethren, sunk in darkness and error, do all we can to reclaim them. Let us forget and forgive the blood which, in the blindness of their zeal, they have drawn from us, and in a spirit of love and candour endeavour to convince them of their errors, by reason and Scripture, and not by unchristian retaliations; that they may at length learn to admire in us the lovely exemplification of our principles by the return of good for evil. Let us also earnestly endeavour to coalesce in that 'unity of the Spirit,' as an effect of right reason and genuine piety, which they vainly boast of, to justify oppression and terror. But, above all, let us use our utmost endeavours to prove our church a true church, and ourselves true Christians, by purity of manners, by a life spent in the rational service of God; that is, in the ardours of heavenly devotion, and in doing good. This is that only powerful, that only convincing argument, which no jusuitical arts can resist, no sophistical subtleties evade. This argument will give dignity and force to all our other reasonings, and will plead when we do not speak. With this the most illiterate peasant may easily baffle all the learning of his opponent; without it, the knowledge of angels hath no right either to speak or be heard. If our cause is the cause of God, and our lives such as may be justified by his holy religion, they will speak for themselves, and God will second them in such a manner, that they who argue and fight against us, must appear, in the judgment of all other men, to argue and fight against God. But if, on a fair comparison, the members of the church of Rome do actually demonstrate more piety in their devotions, and more purity and integrity in their actions, let us then for shame hold our peace. Let us prate no more about reformation of churches, nor impudently quote Scrip-

ture, when we will neither suffer ourselves to be reformed, nor God's word to sink farther into us than our lips. God, in this case, will be on the side of our adversaries, and will thus answer all we can say, 'What have ye to do, to declare my statutes, or that ye should take my covenant in your mouth; seeing ye hate instruction, and cast my words behind you?'

God, of his infinite mercy, enable us to live up to the principles of that religion we profess, lest it rise in judgment against us, and condemn us for sinning against the light. Grant this, we beseech thee, blessed Lord, for the sake of Christ Jesus our Saviour; to whom, with Thee, and the Holy Ghost, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now, and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSES,

CONTROVERSIAL AND PRACTICAL,

ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

PROPER FOR THE

Consideration of the Present Times.

"He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned."—MARK XVI. 16.

"As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."—JAMES II. 26.

[FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE YEAR 1754.]

THE PREFACE,*

ADDRESSED TO

THE CITIZENS OF LONDON.

GENTLEMEN,

THE Author of the following Discourses, having lived for some time among you, and preached many of them in your churches, humbly begs leave to address them to you. To this he is encouraged, not only by the attention and approbation, far exceeding his hopes, with which they were heard; but more especially by the repeated request of some very sensible and worthy members of your body, who pressed him for the publication of them. These gentlemen were, on various accounts, of too much consequence with the Author, not to be gratified. Whether this request shall contribute to his honour at the expense of theirs who made it, is now, with all imaginable respect, submitted to your judgment at large, and to that of every English reader. However this may be, he will think himself a very happy man, if, after thus laying his performances before you, your complacency in accepting shall bear any proportion to the pleasure he felt in presenting them to you. He still doth, and ever will, retain a grateful sense of the many friendships wherewith he was honoured, when in London. He there met with persons of excellent understandings, improved by the successful study of men and things; and of hearts, cultivated to a suitable benevolence, by that intercourse of minds, which waits inseparably on an extensive commerce in affairs. Whether in any other school more integrity and humanity may be learned than in this, the observations he made, during his abode in your city, gave him sufficient reason to doubt. Here virtue, inculcated, not by rules, but examples;

* This Preface was prefixed by the Author to his second volume of Discourses, which included twenty-five, viz. from XXI. to XLV. inclusive, of the present edition. The remaining twenty-nine were first published in the year 1777.

not in words, but actions; is practically imbibed; and shews itself accordingly, not in the words, but actions, of the observer. Here the Author saw, what would appear too paradoxical to be believed in some other places——He saw the wealthy devout, and the man who had a great fortune, in effect, his all, exposed to the winds and waves, unbending himself in an evening, with a surprising greatness of soul, to all the sweets of a cheerful or religious conversation; nay, he saw him maintain his part in this conversation, with such a mixture of wit, sound sense, gaiety, and goodness, as did honour, not only to the solid, but to the ornamental, part of that education, which may be had in the school of business. A stranger, seeing him in this attitude, would not imagine he had been bred from his childhood to trade, or had, at this instant, a single boat on sea. Neither would he imagine, if he knew his application to business so very assiduous, or his economy so exactly frugal, that he could, on proper occasions, find in his heart to live with the liberality of a prince, and, to proper objects, give away with the charity of a saint.

It was in London, and among you, Gentlemen, that the Author of these Discourses formed an idea of private and domestic heroism, which he makes no scruple to prefer to that of politicians and conquerors. He therefore leaves their unjustifiable arts, and bloody laurels, to be made the objects of vulgar admiration by the poets; and, having passed by both the court and camp, and found the truly great man in a counting-house or shop, dedicates his labours, with an inexpressible affection and esteem, to you. Accept, Gentlemen, the tenders of his gratitude; and what, in regard to its own defects, you cannot approve of, be pleased, with your wonted goodness, to indulge, in regard to a writer earnestly studious to demonstrate that respect towards you, and that zeal for the cause of every virtue, which every man, who knows both, must acknowledge to be justly due.

That, in thus addressing you, he speaks not as a flatterer, or as a man of selfish designs, his speaking to a community, and not a particular person, may serve to shew. But, if this is not sufficient, the following Discourses will fully prove it; for, in them he considers the true religion as the only cure for the vices of mankind; and therefore thinks it not sufficient to demonstrate its truths, if in every Discourse they

are not pointed in their full vigour, and with the collected force of all the talents God hath bestowed on the preacher, against the horrible sins of an abandoned age, howsoever backed by numbers, howsoever countenanced by custom, howsoever dignified by station, or privileged by title and power. He little regards what they say, who tell him, it is a folly to expect any thing else from this method, but the contempt, perhaps ruin, of him who takes it. Be it so. However, the servant of God ought to do his duty, and leave the rest to his Master. That this is his duty, the enormous increase of wickedness on the one side, and the commands of God on the other, who, in times like these, bids us 'cry aloud, and spare not,' have made it sufficiently evident. And that his ruin, as the worldly-minded call it, will prove his happiness and glory in the end, is also as certain as the promises of God can make it. If he is not as much an infidel as too many of those he ought to reprove, on these he will rely, and by those he will be guided, and will be in little pain about the consequences.

He hopes his Discourses will be read, because they are new and spirited. And if they are favoured with a perusal, it is possible they may touch the reader in some yet feeling quarter of his heart, to which others, better executed in the main, have been too general, or too tender, to penetrate. He knows there is a large class of men, as well satisfied with their own practices, though vicious, as with their principles, though irreligious; who, therefore, are determined to keep every thing at a distance, which might possibly lessen this satisfaction. But if any of these shall happen to read what I am now writing, let him consider a little, that irreligion may be folly, and vice misery, for aught he can judge, who will consult with nothing but his passions about the one, and with his prejudices only about the other.

How can he who will not try, foresee whether a writer like this, after accosting him with a severer face than usual, may not lead him to another kind of satisfaction, more sincere and perfect, more likely to afford him a solid tranquillity while he lives, and sweet consolations when he dies? It is plain, he must be diffident of the grounds on which that composure is erected, wherein he at present endeavours to rest, because he dare not trust them to the slightest exami-

nation. How he can deal thus contemptuously by his own understanding, and yet conceitedly call himself a rational, nay, a free creature, is inconceivable to a man really in his senses. However, he may venture himself perhaps safely enough with these Discourses. They are not such miracles in their kind, but that their defects, and his unanswerable arguments for infidelity and wickedness, may happen to bring him off, with his favourite system unshaken. Should this be the case, he will have one additional presumption (and surely he needs a thousand) to settle him more securely on the lees of his present infatuation.

Should you, Gentlemen (which God avert), lay aside that attachment to religion and virtue, from which result the many blessings you have long enjoyed; experience will soon teach us to date the ruin of you and your country from that unhappy era. Infidel principles are the source of dissolute practices, and dissipated fortunes. No degree of present prosperity or affluence can stand its ground against dishonesty, striking at the root of that credit, and a vicious profusion, wasting those funds, on which commerce, the spring of wealth, is founded. The city, fully convinced of this important truth, will consider every encroachment of infidelity as they do a French invasion, and treat every pert pretender to disputation, who, having made shipwreck of his principles, harangues for irreligion in the drawing-room, the coffee-house, and such-like talkeries, as a contemptible bankrupt to common sense and common honesty. Thus, Gentlemen, it is hoped, you will look on this coxcomb of controversy, even though he should give himself the air of having learned his infidel parade at St. James's. Your piety is much nearer akin to true wisdom, and your humanity to true politeness, than that superficial pomp and flourish, which the unthinking citizen is apt to admire in the mere courtier. Quit not these honest principles and pursuits, that have made you rich, for the contrary, howsoever dignified by vain appearances, in hopes they will make you great; for if you use your wealth as the Author of religion and giver of wealth prescribes, you are infinitely greater already than all the titles and splendour of nobility can make you.

All the miseries you have ever suffered, or feared, con-

sidered either as private persons, or as a collective and permanent body, were owing to the vices lashed in the Discourses hereby introduced to you: and all your wealth and power have flowed from the virtues therein recommended. The writer before you endeavours to give you a still deeper detestation of those vices, that have engendered all your factions and bankruptcies, all your public and private calamities: and he endeavours to inspire you with a yet warmer attachment to those virtues which have given you your trade, increased your numbers, extended and adorned your buildings, and heaped the delicacies of the world on your tables.

In order to accomplish these happy purposes, he urges the Christian principles in their genuine purity, and with all the weight of their eternal sanctions. And, as the best means deeply to impress the sentiments he would excite, he follows the impulses of nature, without regarding the formality of those rules, to which the critics in sermons would confine that species of performance. As thevariety of subjects, on which discourses of this kind may be executed, and of the minds to which they may be applied, is endless, so he thinks every human talent may be properly exerted in such a work; nay, exerted with all its force, since the ends pursued in such compositions are of infinite moment. How is it possible for the bounded eloquence of man to exceed on topics, every one of which necessarily carries the eye into an eternity of duration, and an immensity of happiness or misery! Topics, on which the miracles of infinite wisdom, compassion, and power, and of human ingratitude, human insensibility, and impenitence, are occasionally to be displayed! Were every word of the preacher to fly on fire to the ears of his audience, they could not be too warm for the subjects he handles, much less too piercing, God knows, for the callous of those minds they are aimed at. The eloquence of the pulpit cannot possibly be too much animated, if good sense and truth give a basis to every period. Where these are found, infidelity itself cannot suspect it of enthusiasm or imposture. But how, on the other hand, to reconcile the frostiness of some discourses on the great things of religion, with the supposition of a lively faith in the preacher, is a difficulty which such a preacher only can explain. He may

say he is a firm believer, and sufficiently warmed with his faith; but thinks reasonable beings ought to be dealt with only by reason. And why only? Why not rather according to their whole nature? Did God give us our passions for nothing? Does religion furnish no objects of love and fear? Or does this dispassionate preacher so far regret his own religious warmths, as to think the communication of them to others would be criminal in him?

If a point is evident of itself, or demonstrated to the understanding, or already taken for granted on good grounds by those who hear us; is there any danger in pressing it home on the heart? or rather, is there any thing else to be done? We know by experience, not only that a man may be convinced, without being moved; but that when he is so, his conviction is of little consequence to him. The prophets, the apostles, and primitive fathers, were above the little arts of rhetoric; yet they wrote and spoke with ardour, as well as the ancient heathen orators. What they had proved, even by miracles, they urged on the active part of the mind with the most pathetic addresses, with the most inducing promises, with the most alarming menaces. The goodness, the power, the majesty, of God, glowed in their descriptions. The virtuous heard, and loved; the vicious heard, and trembled.

If a preacher is forbidden to meddle with the pathetic (in which is comprehended every thing that can rightly stir up the passions), he must be forbidden to quote the Scriptures, where a more than human pathos breathes almost in every page. But if he may quote, why may he not imitate? Or indeed, how can he forbear expressing the vehement emotions of his own heart, if his heart is really moved? He is surely as much at liberty to use enforcements, as reasonings of his own. Nay, it is infinitely more his business to furnish such enforcements, than reasonings, for all those numerous cases, where conviction hath already taken place, but is not attended with a suitable practice. Were a man, for instance, to preach on the subject of murder, it would surely be most impertinent in him to spend the time in proving murder to be a sin, and shewing that God will punish it; which every one knows as well as he. Ought he not rather to say every thing that could heighten the horror of

his audience at the heinousness of that enormous crime? that could rebate their pride, their rage, and malice? that could fill their hearts with sentiments of tenderness towards men, and with awful apprehensions in respect to God and his judgments?

No man hath a more settled aversion to fanaticism and enthusiasm, properly so called, than the Author of these Discourses. But whereas the enemies of religion have always been industrious to throw those contemptuous names on its most rational warmths, and are seconded by all the cold tribe of indifferents, who profess without ever feeling it; we ought carefully to distinguish between the natural and the feverish heat of religion, that we may not be deceived in a matter of more consequence than is generally imagined. In order to this, we may lay it down for a just account of enthusiastic excesses, that they are religious, or rather superstitious, transports, raised against reason, or without it. But this cannot be said of those ardours, in their highest elevation, which breathe nothing but love to God, to mankind, and to virtue; or abhorrence to vice and wickedness. In this light right reason may condemn the fainter warmths of one man, while it justifies the more vehement transports of another. Every thing ought to strike and stir our affections in proportion to its real importance, and our concernment in it. Both reason and nature vote for the justness of this maxim. Reason therefore and nature vote for the highest transports in regard to true religion; because it is of infinitely more importance and concernment to us than all other things. Hence we must conclude, that to be religiously cool, if it is not a contradiction in terms, is at least the most irrational and senseless state of mind we can conceive. Here reason herself bids us be warm, not in animosities and contentions about religion, which are never the growth of that, but of a bad heart; no, she bids us be warm in true piety, and the love of God, and in a settled detestation of every thing that may lessen the love, on either side, between him and us. If the preacher is not thus warmed himself, he will warm nobody, and, consequently, will do no good; especially in an age like this, which for its coldness may be called the winter of Christianity. All disorders require to be cured by applications of a contrary nature. The disorder, that reigns epidemically at present over the minds of men, is of so

chilly a nature, as to call for the most warm and stimulating medicines. Men are hot enough indeed in the pursuit of unlawful pleasures or profits; but the preacher does nothing, who cannot give a better turn to their ardour, who cannot call up their affections from things on earth, and place them, with all their fervour, on things above. And how is that to be done, but by painting both in their proper colours, and urging the comparison on their apprehensions with a force and vehemence proportionable, both to the immensity of the difference, and to the natural numbness of their conceptions?

It is the business of an orator to convince, to stir, and to persuade; of the sacred orator, to convince mankind of such truths, to stir them to such emotions, and to persuade them to such actions, as are necessary to the virtue or reformation, and, consequently, to the happiness, of all who hear him, from the first dawn of reason, through every period of their eternal duration. It is therefore fit to use a greater energy, and, perspicuity being preserved, a greater elevation, of style, in speaking from the pulpit, not only, than in mere controversial and moral treatises, which are not, like sermons, sounded in the ears, and acted before the eyes of men, but also than in any other species of oratory, wherein subjects of infinitely less dignity and importance are handled. The sacred advocate pleads the cause of all that is good, against all that is bad, at the bar of God. Ought he, can he be cool in such a cause? No; the wisdom of God ought to issue like light, the goodness of God ought to pour like refreshing showers of rain, and the judgments of God ought to rush like thunder, from his tongue. To a work so arduous, and, if ably executed, so glorious, every faculty of his soul, and all the purer powers, passions, and affections, of his mind, should be summoned; while all his looks and gestures, as well as words, should co-operate to express the convictions, or enforce the emotions, he feels, and would communicate. If he comes thus prepared to speak, nature will speak with him; and he will not want the aid of art, to soothe, to alarm, to comfort, to terrify, or, in a word, to stamp any impressions on the minds of his audience, which the purposes of religion may require. It will be no boast in the Author of these Discourses to say, he was, so far, thus prepared, that his whole understanding and heart, such as

they are, went with them. This is only to say, he believes what he preaches, and is animated with the zeal of a faithful messenger.

Sermons are generally disregarded, as a dry insipid sort of performances, and accordingly read by few, and heard rather with patience than pleasure. This, no doubt, is owing chiefly to a prevailing disrelish of religion, and of every thing that relates to religion. However, it must at the same time be confessed, that it is, in some measure, owing to the cool and lifeless manner in which they are, for the most part, both penned and preached. If the nature of the subjects on which they are written, and the infinitely interesting ends pursued in them, are considered; it is evident, no sort of composition opens a fairer field for genius to shew itself in the author, or for entertainment to engage the hearer and peruser. Why the graver species of wit, arising from a fine imagination, and conducted by a sound judgment; or why the talent of ridicule, so well fitted, under a proper management, to expose the silly side of vice, should be excluded from this sort of performance, is not easy to conceive. The sacredness of the subjects hath furnished the only plausible argument for this exclusion. But as it is an argument that strikes at the Scriptures, in which both the species of wit, and the use of ridicule, here intimated, are frequently applied to their proper purposes; it ought to be given up, as well in practice as speculation. The Author before you hath sometimes endeavoured to enliven his Discourses, as occasion offered, with strokes in both kinds; and would have done it much oftener, had he not been withheld by a diffidence in his own talents, and a deference to the judgment of better preachers than himself.

But, be these matters as they will, it is humbly hoped, you will please to accept the Discourses thus dedicated to you, if not as performances worthy of your attention, yet as the testimony of a grateful heart, and of all imaginable respect, from,

GENTLEMEN,

Your most obedient,

And most devoted, humble Servant,

PHILIP SKELTON.

DISCOURSE XXI.

THE COVENANT OF PEACE WITH GOD IN CHRIST JESUS OUR MEDIATOR.

COLOSS. I. 21.

You that were sometimes alienated, and enemies in your mind, by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.

THE apostle here says to the Colossians, what he had said in other words to the Ephesians, 'Ye who sometimes were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ; for he is our peace;' and in both tells them, and us all, that we are, by our present sinful nature, alienated from our duty, and made enemies to God; so that we are cast off, and placed at a great distance from his favour, who 'cannot look on iniquity,' without the highest displeasure. But then, to our unspeakable comfort as Christians, he tells us, we 'are now reconciled to God, and brought near to him again, by the blood of Christ, who is our peace, who hath abolished in his flesh the enmity, so making peace for us, and reconciling us unto God by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; through whom we have an access by one Spirit unto the Father.'

Can any thing be so affecting as these two opposite lights, wherein we are set? Such fears and hopes! Such terrors and comforts! The world is made for man, and man for God!

But man rebels, and, becoming an enemy to his almighty Maker, is given up to misery, to death, and to eternal torment. The only-begotten Son of God, finding us in this dreadful condition, takes our nature on him, dies on the cross to pay the wages of our sins, and restores peace between his offended Father and our souls. Thus we are made the objects of mercy, justice having been satisfied for our sins; and, if we sincerely believe, and truly repent, shall again be taken into favour, and taste the happy effects of that favour, in joy, in glory, in life eternal.

If this had not been our own case, and we had been only

told it of those beings who inhabit some other planet or world, how should we have been astonished and affected! A race of rational creatures at war with their Maker, and reconciled to him by the death of his Son! Which of the two must have struck us with the greater amazement? Their rebellion, or his compassion?

But this, dearly beloved in Christ Jesus, is not the account of a distant world, nor of a foreign people; nor is it a theatrical fable, contrived to work on our affections by mere imaginary fears and hopes. No, it is the true story of ourselves, of our rebellion and misery, of our redemption and glory; and God himself is the historian. Is it possible then we can hear it without the utmost emotion? Is there an affection, a passion, or any single spring of thought within us, that does nor stir with all its force at the awakening relation? If we are not lost to reason, and destitute of all sense and feeling, this must rouse us to reflections infinitely more deep and keen, than any thing else we can possibly think of. And if we are roused or moved, in any proportion to the important dignity of the subject, we are then in a proper frame of mind to consider the danger and misery we are exposed to by nature, the happiness we are called to by the gospel, and the conditions, on which this happiness is proposed to us by our Saviour.

In the first place, if we consider the divine nature and our own, as we now find it, we must conclude, there is enmity between them, and that our natural state is a state of war with God. As God is holy and good himself, he cannot but hate sin, and those who commit sin. Now, our lives, through the corruption of our nature, are so stained with sins of all sorts, that as sure as God is good, so surely must we be objects of his displeasure. On the other hand, such is the purity of his laws, and such the wickedness and perverseness of our wills, that we are naturally as averse to his injunctions, as he is to our actions. Thus while God resents our vices, and we resist his will, the enmity becomes mutual.

Notwithstanding all that education and correction can do for us when we are young, and all the power that religion, and the laws of our country, have over us, when we are grown up, they of mankind who keep within tolerable bounds,

are but few, in comparison of such as lead very disorderly and sinful lives; and even the best of men are so very often, and sometimes so extremely wanting to their duty, that experience sufficiently proves the universal corruption of our nature, and consequently the natural enmity between God and us. Now this is far worse than simple enmity, because as God is our maker, our preserver, and governor, we cannot thus resist his will, without foul ingratitude, and horrible rebellion.

What experience tells us in this matter, the word of God strongly confirms. It will be sufficient to quote two or three passages, out of an infinite number, to prove a point so clear in itself, as God's hatred to sin. David, speaking of Christ, says, 'Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness.' 'The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,' saith Solomon. The prophet Habakkuk tells us, 'God is of purer eyes than to behold evil; and that he cannot look upon iniquity.' And, as sin itself is said to be 'enmity against God,' so those who are guilty of it, are called his enemies. 'Whosoever,' saith St. James, 'will be a friend to the world, is an enemy of God;' and, by 'world,' he means the unlawful desire, or enjoyment of worldly things.

St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Colossians, says, that 'the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience, on account of fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.' 'Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish,' are denounced in the Epistle to the Romans, 'on every soul that doth evil.' 'The face of the Lord,' saith David, 'is against them that do evil.' 'There is no peace, saith the Lord, to the wicked.'

Thus it appears, that sin is enmity, and they who commit sin, enemies to God. Now, if it shall appear as plainly, that all men do by nature live in a state of sin, it will follow, that all men are by nature in a state of enmity, or war with God; but of this there is abundant proof. 'God saw,' saith Moses, 'that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.' 'All we,' saith Isaiah, 'like sheep, have gone astray.' 'Behold,' saith the Psalmist, 'I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin hath my mother

conceived me.' St. Paul concludes from these words of David, 'There is none righteous, no, not one;' that not only the Gentiles, but the Jews also, are all under sin, inasmuch as 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, and the way of peace have they not known.' 'The Scripture,' saith he, to the Galatians, 'hath concluded all under sin;' and to the Ephesians, 'We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise.' 'The natural man,' saith the same apostle, 'receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him.' 'The heart,' saith the prophet Jeremy, 'is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?'

From what hath been said it is plain, we are naturally corrupt and wicked, and that God abhors us, as such; although, considered as his creatures, he hath that compassion for us, which the best of fathers retains for his undutiful and disobedient children.

What we are to expect, if we remain in this state of sin and enmity with God, is easy to conceive; namely, the effects of his displeasure; and what those are, the Scriptures tell us so plainly, that it must be our own faults, if we are not sufficiently apprised of them, and alarmed at them. 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.' 'The wicked,' we are told, 'shall go away into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.' 'The wages of sin is death,' not only temporal, but eternal. It is, therefore, 'a most fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,' after having spent our days in rebellion against a Being infinitely too wise to be imposed on, too just to be biassed, and too powerful to be resisted.

On the other hand, if peace is made between him and us, and kept on our side, by a due observation of the conditions, we shall then 'be made meet to be partakers of the inheritance with the saints in light;' we shall then 'shine in the kingdom of our Father, as the stars, for ever and ever;' then shall 'we receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him;' then shall we be placed 'at his right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore;' and,

to make our happiness most perfect, we shall see God in peace, and know him only in the blessed effects of his love, which it is as impossible for us now to conceive, as it will be then to utter.

How then is this peace, of such infinite importance to us, both on account of the miseries it delivers us from, and the happiness it gives us hopes of, to be made? And what are the terms and conditions, on which it is offered? Though we should be subjected to all manner of difficulties, as preparatory to peace with God; yet, as there is no standing out, nor remaining in a state of war and rebellion, against 'him with whom we have to do,' it is our business to close with any conditions, though ever so rigorous. But we need not be afraid; for God, whose mercy is equal to his power, knowing of what we are made, hath, of his own free motion and grace, invited us to peace, through a covenant founded in the blood of his Son; which, by the assistance he engages to lend us, it will not only be easy, but after a little struggle with ourselves, extremely pleasant to keep. Our blessed Saviour and Mediator, who hath procured the benefit of this covenant for us by the 'sacrifice of his blood,' hath appointed the sacrament of baptism as the means whereby the contracting parties, God and the new Christian, solemnly plight their promises to each other; and hath likewise made the other sacrament, that of his last supper, the seal which renews and confirms the covenant with every penitent transgressor. In both he communicates the assistance of the Holy Spirit, which 'helps our infirmities,' and enables us, if we are not shamefully wanting to ourselves, to observe and perform the conditions promised on our part.

As Christ, and all the benefits of his passion, and holy religion, are proposed to us in this covenant; as there is no other way to escape the vengeance threatened, or obtain the blessings promised, in holy Scripture; and as it is by the articles engaged for on our part in this solemn compact, that we must live here, and be judged hereafter; so there is nothing knowable, which we are so much concerned to understand, nothing practicable, which we are so much interested to observe and follow, as this. From no other fountain can we derive any reasonable hopes or fears of considerable consequence to us. Heaven and hell depend

on it; and therefore all our attention ought to be centred in it. All that is to pass between God and us, is to be regulated according to the Christian covenant here, and to be determined by it hereafter.

Since this is truly the case, let us see what it is that God's promises and ours are interchangeably pledged for in this most sacred contract.

We have already seen in general what we are to expect as the fruits of peace with God; namely, eternal life, eternal happiness and glory. Our present assurance of this is represented in various lights by the Scriptures. We are made one with Christ, as he is one with the Father. We are united into one church, or spiritual body, whereof 'he is the head.' All together 'we are the body of Christ, and members in particular.' Thus joined to him, who is by nature the Son of God, we also become, by 'a new birth in baptism,' the adopted sons or children of God. 'We have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father;' and being taken into the family of God, are made his children by 'faith in Christ Jesus.' The provision made for us is suitable to the grandeur of our new relation; no less than an eternal kingdom, 'which it is the Father's good pleasure to give us,' as his beloved children, and consequently 'heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; insomuch that being one with him, where he is, there shall we be also,' partakers both of his nature, and of his inheritance in happiness and glory. We need not say, since these are the promises of God, that they cannot possibly fail of performance, provided we do our utmost to fulfil the promises made on our part.

But how shall we enter into a covenant of peace with God, since we are by nature at enmity with him, and averse to his laws? Can we act against our nature? 'Can the branch of the wild olive be,' of itself, 'cut off, and grafted into a good olive tree?' Or, supposing this covenant once established between God and us, how shall creatures, so naturally wicked, act up to rules so perfectly pure and holy, as no doubt the infinitely holy Being will prescribe? The Son of God, after having appeased his Father's wrath against us by the sacrifice of his blood, now calls us as a mediator, pleading with us as with the Father, first, to a

due consideration of our danger in a natural state of enmity with God, and of the blessed fruits proposed by peace with him; secondly, requires in us a firm resolution to exert our utmost powers in performing the articles of that peace; and thirdly, assures us, so far as our own strength is insufficient, of the effectual aids of his Holy Spirit.

The first thing to be done by us in making a covenant of peace with God, is to renounce and declare war with his enemies, the devil, the world, and the flesh; between whom and us there had been too close a league, while we were under the influence of a corrupt and disorderly nature. We cannot be at the same time in peace with God and his enemies, because they prescribe two opposite schemes of life. He who does not proclaim war with the devil, and all the irreligious principles, or wicked actions he would tempt us to, such as atheism, blasphemy, profaneness, rebellion, &c. remains still in a state of war and enmity with God. He who does not renounce, and bid defiance to the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, to covetousness, to pride, ambition, &c. which did at first in the devil, and do still both in him, and the unregenerate part of mankind, so directly oppose the divine nature and will, remains in a state of enmity with God. He who does not set his resolution, and arm his heart against the sinful lusts of the flesh, such as intemperance, luxury, malice, anger, and concupiscence, continues still in a state of enmity with God. If we submit ourselves to God, we must resist the devil. If we 'love God, we must not love the world, neither the things that are in the world; for if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' If we dedicate ourselves to the service of God, as the members of Christ, we must have 'crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts;' knowing, that, 'if we live after the flesh, we shall die; but, if through the Spirit we do mortify the deeds of the body, we shall live' with God.

The next thing to be done by us, on embracing the covenant of peace with God, is to believe sincerely all that God hath revealed to us in his word, and more especially such articles of faith as relate immediately to God, the object of our worship; and to his will, the rule of our actions. He who knows not the governor in any community, knows not

whom to obey. He who knows not his laws, knows not how to obey. He who knows not the rewards and punishments annexed to those laws, is not likely to obey; because he knows not the reasons or motives of obedience. Faith in the holy Trinity is necessary; because it is that into which we are baptized, when we enter into the covenant. Faith in the satisfaction made by Christ for our sins is necessary; because on that is founded his office of mediation, whereby the covenant of peace with God was obtained. Faith in his incarnation is necessary; because without a body he could not have made the atonement, nor consequently procured the covenant. Faith in the assistance of the Holy Spirit is necessary; because we know, or ought to know, that, without such assistance, we are not able to keep the covenant. And faith in a judgment to come, and endless rewards and punishments to follow, is necessary, because, if these are not believed in, the laws of God, which we covenant to obey, can have little or no influence on our practice. We see these articles of faith are so closely connected with the covenant, that it is impossible for us to receive it, and disbelieve them. Besides, on these the Scriptures lay the greatest stress; and therefore they demand our closest attention. God pledges his word for their truth; and therefore we must believe them. These were the principal things which Christ came to do and teach, either personally, or by his Holy Spirit; and he tells us, 'He that believeth on the Son, hath eternal life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him,' as at first; because he hath not that faith, which is necessary to a covenant of peace with God.

The last thing we are to promise in covenanting with God, is, a strict observance of all his commandments. To refuse this, is to deny his supreme authority; is to proclaim war with him, and declare ourselves rebels to his government. Without a promise therefore for this purpose, we can neither have peace nor covenant with God.

But such a promise will be highly presumptuous and offensive in the sight of God, if it is not founded on a sincere and deep repentance for all our former transgressions of his laws. For this reason we are commanded 'to repent,' and then 'to be baptized;' and surely it is a strong one; for

what hope can there be of future obedience, but what arises from a thorough concern and sorrow for past offences? And how can the baptismal covenant be embraced by him, whose prospect of fulfilling this important promise is warranted by no aversion to the violation of it; and consequently, by no fixed resolution to guard against it hereafter? We see, God calls us to repentance, and the covenant, at once; and therefore we cannot come to the one, if we bring not the other with us, without the impious absurdity of attempting a peace with God and sin, at the same time.

But, in case we do truly repent, then we are to consider, that as, upon engaging in the Christian covenant, we are concerned with God the ruler of the religious kingdom, and with mankind our fellow-subjects; so the laws or commandments to be observed relate partly to him, and partly to them. If we do not promise to keep those which relate to God, we cannot enter into his kingdom; because, where there is no promise of obedience on the one side, there can be no expectation of it on the other; and consequently, wrath and enmity must remain. Again, if we do not promise to keep those commandments that relate to our fellow-subjects, or fellow-Christians, we thereby declare war with them, and of course with him who represents and protects them.

The observation of God's commandments, whether relating to himself, or our neighbour, is every where pressed on us, with all the force that either promises or menaces can add to that important part of our duty. It is also pressed on us as the means of deliverance from the tyranny of those enemies we renounce in our covenant with God; for Christ joins it to the institution of baptism. 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you;' and Zacharias pleads it as the promise of God to Abraham, that 'we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.' But it is carefully to be observed, that our obedience cannot procure the approbation of God, if it does not proceed from a principle of love towards him and our neighbour; for he says, 'If ye love me,

keep my commandments. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; this is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two hang all the law and the prophets;' for 'love is the fulfilling of the law.' God, we see, requires our obedience on that amiable, that exalted principle of charity, wherewith he purposes to unite us to himself, and one another, in the glorious community formed by the Christian covenant. This purely moral part of the covenant which was once delivered from Mount Sinai in a voice that 'shook the earth,' and struck terror into those that received it, is now founded by our blessed Saviour on the love of God and man; and not only proposed as a rule, for our outward actions, but as a pure and spiritual 'law of liberty,' correcting our inward thoughts, and teaching us to consider God as a searcher of hearts, who will judge us by our wills, as well as our deeds.

Carrying this observation with us, let us briefly touch the purport of each commandment; and those first, that prescribe our duty to God himself. In the first place, we must, by love, fear, prayer, and dependance, worship the Lord our God, and serve him alone, by every instance, whether in thought or deed, of duty and obedience to whatsoever he enjoins. Not to worship him, or to worship any thing else, in this manner, is revolt, rebellion, and a removal of enmity with God.

Secondly, To pay any part of our worship to an image, a picture, or any other creature, as the representative of God, is not, 'to worship him in spirit and truth,' as he requires; nor 'to flee from idolatry,' as he commands; but to thrust in the creatures between God and our affections of love, reverence, and trust; which excites his jealousy, and is therefore regarded by him as a declaration of war and rebellion against him.

Thirdly, To swear falsely by his name, or to profane it by using it in our common or idle discourse, is in both instances to take his awful name in vain; because, in the one case, it is applied to no purpose, and, in the other, to a concealment, not a discovery, of the truth; which, he tells

us, he will look on as a horrible sin, that is, as an insolent affront to his majesty, and an act of enmity and hostility against him.

Fourthly, To seize any thing dedicated to God, particularly by his own commandment, more especially that day which he hath set apart for his worship, and our instruction, and to apply it to common or profane uses, is a violation committed on his peculiar property, and consequently an act of enmity against him.

As to those commandments which contain our duty towards our neighbour, they are the commandments of God, as well as those that relate immediately to himself; and therefore we cannot transgress them, without a grievous injury to God, and our neighbour, who is under his government and protection.

To dishonour, or, in any thing lawful, to disobey our parents, or such as God, by his providence, hath set over us, with either civil or spiritual authority, is to dishonour and resist God in his deputy; for he commands us to honour and obey our parents; to be subject to principalities and powers; to obey and submit ourselves to them who have the rule over us in spiritual matters; 'for they watch for our souls, as they that must give an account;' and to be subject to our masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.

To take away the life of any man, without a lawful cause or authority; to maim or injure his person, or even to be angry with him, without a sufficient cause; is to attack God in his image; is to shew hatred, where he prescribes love; who saith, 'A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another. Whosoever hateth his brother, is a murderer;' and God will be the avenger, not only of blood, but of malice, which thirsts for blood.

To commit uncleanness of any kind, in thought, word, or deed, more especially to be guilty of fornication, adultery, or other more unnatural lusts, too abominable to be named, is to render ourselves foul and hateful in the sight of God; and, as it wounds both our own souls, and those of our unhappy partners in sin, it represents us as tempters, seducers, and as enemies of that pure and holy God, who saith, 'I have not called you to uncleanness, but to holiness; flee

fornication, knowing that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God.' Whoremongers and adulterers I will judge; and I will judge them by their desires and wills, for, in my sight, 'he who looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.'

To possess ourselves of our neighbour's property, by theftt by robbery, by fraud, by extortion, or by oppression, is to provoke God, the guardian of justice, who saith 'Let him that stole, steal no more; thou shalt not rob thy neighbour; let no man go beyond, or defraud his brother in any matter; the extortioner shall not inherit the kingdom of God; ye shall not oppress one another; woe to him who buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong, who useth his neighbour's service without wages.'

To give false testimony before the magistrate, or in a court of justice, or either lightly or maliciously to take away the character of our neighbour, is one of the most grievous injuries we can do him, and a deliberate insult upon God, who saith, 'Thou shalt not raise a false report; put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness; I hate a false witness, that speaketh lies; I myself will be a swift witness against the false swearer; judge not, that ye be not judged; charity thinketh no evil; therefore speak evil of no man; speak not evil one of another; he that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law; but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. But there is one lawgiver, who is able to save, and to destroy: Who art thou that judgest another?' Who art thou that judgest the servant of another? 'To his own master he standeth or falleth; yea, he shall be holden up;' for I am able to make him stand in spite of thee, who presumest to place thyself in my tribunal, and sit in judgment on thy fellow-servant, perhaps thy fellow-sinner, whose offences are not more provoking than thy own.

In the last place, to covet our neighbour's wife or possessions, or to desire them, without acquiring a just or legal right to them, is as great a sin, as actually to seize them; perhaps in this respect a greater, that the regard we pay to the laws of men, withholds our hand; whereas we shew so

little for those of God, who sees and judges the heart, that there is nothing wanting but opportunity and secrecy, to the full execution of the injurious purpose we are invited to by our dishonest principles and desires. It is no difficult matter to judge in what light he must stand before God, who hath no other sense of duty than what arises from his fear of worldly shame or punishment; while he sets the laws and judgments of God at nought, as if the ruler of the world could neither see nor punish. Hath not God commanded us to be content with such things as we have? To 'take heed and beware of covetousness,' which he calls idolatry? Is he not in a state of war and enmity with God, who is thus prepared for the violation of his neighbour's property; who is restrained by the laws of men, but despises the commandment of God; and whose heart is alienated from the true object of love and worship, to an idol, or false god, of his own erecting?

Now here it is to be observed, that neither branch of intemperance, gluttony or drunkenness, is expressly forbidden in any of these commandments. And why? But because these laws of God are laid on men, that is, rational creatures, and not on brutes; and therefore imply the absence of both those vices in all his subjects. He who enjoined these duties, enjoined also the necessary means. Now a sensual brute, though in the shape of a man, is in no capacity to perform any one of these laws; and therefore, if these two vices had not been sufficiently condemned in other parts of Scripture, yet as here they are, by necessary consequence, prohibited in every single commandment, the sensualist stands condemned, by the tenor of the whole moral law, as an enemy to God. His over-heated blood, and pampered passions, are surely far enough from renouncing the lusts of the flesh, and from a disposition to conform to the will of God.

All the duties we owe ourselves, such as religious knowledge, temperance, sobriety, humility, meekness, contentedness, &c. come under this way of reasoning; and are comprehended in the commandments of God, though those commandments seem to have only God and our neighbour for their objects. Nay, the principles whereon we seek our own improvement and happiness, is the very principle and spring

of all the duties to be performed either to God or man; first, because it is most evident, that the virtues just now mentioned, while they render us good and happy in ourselves, tend directly to make us dutiful to God, and both just and beneficent to mankind; as it is, on the contrary, that he who is not thus principled, is neither in a capacity, nor disposition, to demean himself, as he ought, to God or man: and, secondly, because the motives to the performance of our duty, both to our Maker, and neighbour, work on us chiefly, if not only, through that regard we have for our own happiness, temporal and eternal. What is it prevails on us to do the duties of either table? Is it not because we firmly believe we shall be happy, if we do, and miserable, if we do not, perform those duties? He therefore who sins against God, or his neighbour, sins against himself. He only, who is a good man in himself, is prepared to be a good servant to the former, and a good neighbour or fellow Christian to the latter. Thus, you see, the law of God is perfect, and takes in every branch of our duty to God, ourselves, and our neighbours.

St. Paul tells us, this 'law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good;' and our Saviour, expressly mentioning these commandments, saith, 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.' But, as all men are not tempted to the transgression of the same commandments, and few or none to the transgression of them all; lest any man should think himself excusable in the breach of some, while he keeps the rest, St. James gives him to understand, that 'whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all; for he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill.' He who transgresses any one law of God, tramples on the authority of the Lawgiver; and it is only for want of inclination, not of disrespect for God, if he does not violate all the rest.

But although it is certain, that, in strict justice, all transgressions of God's law render us liable to the punishment, yet we are not to despair on falling into sin, because our covenant of peace with God is a covenant of mercy, as well as works, established between a gracious Maker, who knows the temptations wherewith we are beset; and frail creatures, who cannot always stand upright. If 'all our

righteousnesses are as filthy rags; if, after we have done all we can, we are unprofitable servants;' and cannot, by our best performances, merit the joys of heaven; neither shall our worst actions sink us into the pit of misery, if we repent and amend. It is not on the footing of our own, but Christ's righteousness, that we are to be saved. He that is without sin, may claim salvation of his own goodness, and bring in God as his debtor; 'for to him that worketh is the reward, not reckoned of grace, but of debt; but to us who work not, but believe on him that justifieth the ungodly, our faith is counted for righteousness' in the sight of God, who deals with us as children whom his Son hath redeemed from the punishment of sin by his precious blood, not rigorously exacting justice, but graciously extending mercy. There is none who is righteous, none who is good, but God; yet he who is comparatively called the righteous man, falls seven times a day; but he does not, like the reprobate, sin through malicious wickedness, nor fall, but through infirmity; and, when he does fall, he rises again in a sincere repentance, with new resolution. While he endeavours to render his great Master all due allegiance and obedience, and still keeps the field, with all his strength against his enemies, he is, no doubt, the object of mercy, although the discharge of his duty should be attended with much imperfection; although he should be often worsted, yet, as long as he does not submit, he is still on God's side, and under his banner. An unsuccessful battle is not a sufficient cause why so gracious a commander should cast him off for ever. There is great difference between a defeat, if it is not total, and a treacherous revolt, or a base submission.

However, we must not suffer this doctrine, sweet as it is true, to encourage us to carelessness in sin; but must make it our chief motive to repentance. We are not to 'despise the richness of God's goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering,' as if we knew not that 'the goodness of God leadeth, or inviteth us to repentance.' 'We must not after our hardness, and impenitent heart, treasure up unto ourselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them, who, by patient continu-

ance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good.' We are still, in the midst of all our soothing hopes of mercy, to remember, that our vows are solemnly pledged to God in baptism for a faith and practice as conformable to the conditions of our covenant, as we can possibly make them. If, through a miserable fondness for our own ways, and a mistaken overstretch of God's supposed compassion, 'we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?' Although all this shuts not the door against repentance for sins committed after baptism; yet it is sufficient to shew us the necessity of standing fast in that faith we engaged for, and walking in those commandments we promised to keep, by an awful vow, when we entered into covenant with God; for we see, that by a final falling away from this covenant, in either respect, we 'trample on the Son of God;' we profane the holy covenant; we insult the Spirit of God; and consequently replunge ourselves into a state of war and enmity with the Almighty Being, insomuch that we are here called 'his adversaries,' and threatened as such, with 'fearful judgments, and fiery indignation.' It had been infinitely better for us to have continued in our natural state, 'born in sin, and the children of wrath,' on account of Adam's sin and our own, than to have sinned against the light, against a solemn contract, voluntarily entered into with Almighty God, and sealed, on his side, with the blood of his son; and on ours, by an awful vow. 'It had indeed been better for us,' as St. Peter says, 'not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after we

have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto us.'

We ought to consider, that this is not a covenant contrary to our nature, and imposed on us by another, for his own good, and not ours; but that its conditions are absolutely necessary to purify our nature, and prepare us for happiness; that as such, we freely choose to make them the foundation of peace with God; that they are therefore laws of our own enacting, although God first drew them up, and proposed them; that they are to us truly a law of liberty, because we gave them the force of laws in respect to ourselves, by our own voluntary ratification; and that, on all these accounts, it would be foolish, preposterous, and impious to the highest degree, in us, to slight them, by a cool or partial observation of them, since God hath put it in our power to treat them with a more suitable respect.

To conclude therefore; let us make the articles of this most interesting covenant the subject of deep and continual meditations. Let us reflect, that our eternal happiness absolutely depends on the observation, and our eternal misery infallibly pursues the transgression of it. Let us consider, what it cost to procure this contract; no less than the blood of Christ, the eternal, the only-begotten Son of God. Let us consider, that it is with the awful God we have exchanged promises in this important treaty of peace. With our thoughts intensely stretched on these reflections, let us fear and tremble exceedingly before God, on the review of all our past transgressions; and, in the strength of this fear, deepened by a truly penitential sorrow, improved by an ingenuous shame, and lifted above despair by an ardent love of God, let us now at length, like true champions for God, for religion, for heaven, resolutely address ourselves to the performance of our vows.

And, in order to a successful accomplishment of this arduous warfare, may the gracious captain of our salvation be pleased to bestow on us the whole armour of God, and the powerful aids of his Holy Spirit; that 'we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, and more than conquerors, through him that loved us, may serve him henceforth without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life. And now, to the blessed and only Poten-

tate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, or can see, be honour and power everlasting.' Amen.

DISCOURSE XXII.

THE COVENANT OF PEACE RENEWED AND CONTINUED.

1 Cor. xi. 28.

Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

Among all the wise sayings of the ancient philosophers, none is so much, or so justly, admired, as this, 'Know thyself.' Real knowledge, in all its branches, is the most useful and ornamental possession we can possibly attain to. Without necessary knowledge, a man is but a brute or idiot; without some knowledge of civility, of the arts and sciences, he is but a clown. But necessary knowledge is first to be acquired; then that which is useful; and afterward that which is ornamental. Of the first, some articles are more necessary than others; for instance, the knowledge of God, and ourselves. Yet in a very numerous class of men, curiosity and pride have advanced the last kind of knowledge into the place of the first, and preferred parade to necessity. They know all manner of persons and things, but God: they know what passes every where, but in themselves: their minds are dieted on the frothy part of learning; but are strangers to man's meat, or solid food; and often even to milk, the nourishment of babes.

Few men have time to lay out on the pursuit of much knowledge; and of those that have, the greater part are rendered unhappy, or ridiculous, by always hunting for deep or remote refinements; and so continue, through their whole

lives, shamefully ignorant of themselves. Their minds are always at the windows, looking out this way for impertinent speculations, and that way for the follies and vices of their neighbours; while all within the house is in disorder and confusion. These ramblers in knowledge spend their lives in inquiries made at a vast distance from themselves, and come at last to be wonderfully knowing in every thing, but that which it concerns them most to know, the necessary means of their own present quiet, and future happiness, that is, the knowledge of God and his will, as set forth in the Christian covenant; and the knowledge of themselves, of their capacities, and dispositions. Knowledge, however, like charity, should begin at home. A man ought first to know himself, and his duty, together with all the helps necessary to the performance of his duty; and then it will be time enough for him to go a sporting with his curiosity.

We see how much pains they, who govern kingdoms, are at, in reading the histories of various countries, more especially their own; how they study the talents and tempers of men; how they labour to find out what in human nature requires restraint; what, encouragement; what, direction; what, amendment; what, total suppression. And does any man think he shall be able to govern himself, without making himself his study? Is he so stupid an idiot, as not to have perceived, that this, which is really a great and mysterious branch of knowledge, requires some application? Surely he cannot hope to govern himself rightly for the future, if he knows not what sort of a man he hath hitherto been, is now, or may be hereafter. It is of all things, most necessary he should be well skilled in the history of himself, of his passions, his weakness, his defects of understanding, his depravity of will, his corruption of heart, which have hitherto betrayed him into all the sins and miseries of his life. If he retained a feeling sense of his former miscarriages, he would not be so ready to throw himself in the way of those snares, in which he hath already smarted. A bird once caught, preserves a useful memory of the gin: in vain is the same net, at least, spread in the sight of the same bird. But the man who knows not himself, is not so cautious. He derives no advantage from his years. While his back bends,

and his head whitens with age, he is still young and green in point of prudence, because after a thousand experiments, he hath laid up no stock of experience, is still unacquainted with himself.

Whosoever knows not the principles of those he trusts, or deals with, hath nothing, but his good fortune, to thank for it, if he knows them not at last to his cost.

Whosoever knows not the state of his own accounts and affairs, can never regulate his expenses; may starve in plenty, or riot in want; and, when necessity at length forces him to look into his circumstances, how must he be shocked to find his whole conduct utterly unconformable to the state of his affairs!

But whosoever knows not himself, is the most despicable and miserable sort of fool, because he is ignorant of one with whom he is to consult and transact every thing, and on whom he must of necessity rely. How he is grieved to find his judgment imposed on, his measures baffled, his resolutions broken, and all his schemes defeated, not by another, not by an enemy, but by himself; may he not say, on such occasions, 'Had mine enemy done this, I could have borne it?' Nay, he may go farther than the psalmist; for he may justly say, 'Had my familiar friend betrayed me, and magnified himself against me,' I might have taken care to guard against his treachery for the future, 'and hid myself from him. But it was thou,' my inseparable companion, my guide, 'with whom I took sweet counsel' (sweet indeed but destructive), 'with whom I walked to the house of God,' who prescribed all my desires and designs, who dictated even my devotions to me, it was thou, my own heart, that hast undone me. 'Thou art deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; how shall I know thee?' When the conduct, necessary to my happiness, requires courage in thee, thou art fearful and irresolute; when it requires caution, thou art rash and giddy; when perseverance, thou art fickle and unsteady; when change and reformation, thou art obstinate and hardened. With what light shall I search into thy dark corners? Or with what armour shall I defend myself against an enemy, that lurks within the 'shield of faith, the helmet of salvation,' and 'the breast-plate of righteous-

ness?' Thus grievously hath he reason to exclaim against himself, who knows not himself, whose heart is a stranger to his head.

It is far otherwise with him who knows himself, because he can oblige his faculties and passions to act in concert; or if there are some that will dissent, and grow refractory, he knows how to be on his guard against them. He knows how far he can safely trust to the strength of his understanding, and where instruction becomes necessary. He knows where his inward traitors are wont to hold a dangerous correspondence, and how to keep a watchful eye on their motions. He can see the faithful friend through the frowns of conscience, and can even court its admonitions. He can see the treacherous enemy through the smiles of desire and pleasure; and, armed with a lively remembrance of past lapses, past corrections, past remorses, can shun the ruinous delusion.

But it may now be asked, how the necessary knowledge of ourselves is to be acquired? Phylosophy only bids us know ourselves, as supposing every man acquainted with the methods whereby this may be effected; such, in particular, as attention to what passes within him, and reflection on what he thought, spoke, or did, under such or such circumstances. But the Scriptures go farther. They advise us to search and try our own ways, and to examine ourselves. They also propose to us the articles of our covenant as the rules by which this examination is to be managed. And lest care and diligence should be wanting in creatures so averse to the severities of a religious self-examination, likely as often as made, to end in repentance and mortification, they tell us, 'every one of us shall give an account of himself to God;' which we know cannot be done, as becomes reasonable beings under covenant, if we do not often call ourselves to a fair and strict account before our consciences for the performance or non-performance of what we vowed when we made peace with God. But that a matter of so much consequence as self-examination may be enforced with something more than precept, our Lord hath appointed a solemn and sacred commemoration of his death in the holy eucharist; which we are, as often as we possibly can, to celebrate, from the time we come to the

years of discretion, until he removes us from this world; which, however, we cannot celebrate otherwise, than at the risk of our own salvation, without a careful and thorough examination of ourselves, as the apostle tells us in the passage of which my text makes a part.

Now, although he does not there point out to us how, or in what particulars, we are to examine ourselves, in order to a worthy participation of our Lord's body and blood; yet we can be at no loss for directions on the occasion, since we cannot fail to perform the intention of the Holy Spirit, if we examine ourselves on the articles of our baptismal covenant, which contain all our religion requires of us either to believe or practise. Besides, this method of examination is plainly enough hinted to us by our blessed Saviour, who said, when he gave the cup, 'This is my blood of the new testament,' or covenant. If it is to us that blood by which he purchased the covenant of peace for us, if it is called the blood of the covenant, of the everlasting covenant; then does it loudly call on us, as often as we purpose to receive it, to think seriously on that covenant; to found the examination, recommended by the apostle on the articles of that covenant; and, whereinsoever we find our past lives unconformable to it, no doubt it must be our duty to repent, and resolve on a more strict observance of our vow for the time to come.

There is no separating the two sacraments, which flowed together from Christ's side, pierced by the spear, in the form of blood and water; because our covenant is equally contained in both. The sacrament of baptism introduces us to a covenant of peace with God. The sacrament of the Lord's supper keeps up our attention to this covenant, and enables us to stand fast in it. How can any man presume to say, the former is, and the latter is not the covenant, when the former is nowhere expressly called by that name, whereas Christ, when he instituted the latter said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood;' when the death of Christ, by which God is reconciled to us, is the very thing applied to us in both; for if, by the one, 'we shew forth the Lord's death till he come,' by the other we are buried with him in death; and when that peace, which is begun in the first, is improved into a union with God in the last? Merely as to

the business of covenanting, the second sacrament is no more than the first continued on, under a different form; for in both we are cleansed from our sins by the blood of Christ, and restored to peace and favour in the sight of God; the examination, therefore, preparatory to the second, must turn on the articles stipulated in the first. In this behalf they are but one and the same thing, and require the same preparation.

As therefore, self-examination, by the rule of the Christian covenant, is either the very remedy prescribed by the apostle, against the sin of an unworthy receiving, and the danger of damnation or equivalent to it; we cannot help looking on it as the first necessary step to the performance of that solemn duty, which seals, applies, and confirms to us all the benefits of Christ's death on God's part; and on ours ratifies and renews the covenant of peace, which by our sins, after baptism, we had transgressed. As the natural enmity between God and us is recalled by such sins, either there is no instituted act whereby peace may be restored, after the covenant hath been broken which would give us a frightful idea of Christianity; or the sacrament of the Lord's supper is such an act. I say frightful, because there is no man that sinneth not; insomuch that if we Christians, not excepting the very best of us, 'say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.' Now, as the peace is daily broken by our sins, does it not require some institution equivalent to baptism, a sacrament that cannot be repeated, to assure the restoration of peace, if it may be at all restored? And what other institution is there, on which we may build the hope of such a restoration, but the sacrament of the Lord's supper, in which that blood whereby remission of sin was obtained, and whereby the covenant is confirmed to us is received? If the covenant once broken cannot be renewed, then it is a dreadful covenant of works only, and not of grace, mercy, and peace. But if it may be renewed, common sense will tell us it must be by a solemnity as sacred, and as important, as that of the covenant itself, to which a thorough resolution of amendment, particularly as to the act of transgression, must, of necessity, be preparatory; and nothing but a strict and severe examination of ourselves can lead the way to such a resolution. Now the

importance of sin, and enmity with God, on the one side, and of peace with him on the other, makes all this necessary, that we may not be tempted to presume on too easy terms of forgiveness. We may repent, we may be pardoned, we may be received again into peace, and be reunited to God, by a participation of that cup, which is the communion of the blood of Christ, and of that bread, which is the communion of the body of Christ; but not without a renewal of that covenant and vow, which alone can give us peace with God, and which we have transgressed.

Hence it appears, that all we can hope for, as Christians, depends absolutely on our baptismal covenant; that, after transgressing this covenant, all our hopes depend on a renewal of it in the sacrament of our Lord's supper; that no such renewal can be made without the renunciation of God's enemies, without the faith and repentance promised in the covenant itself; and that, if we presume to approach the table of the Lord, before we have thoroughly examined whether we can bring these requisite conditions with us, we do not come to make peace with, but war on, God, by an insult as formal and solemn, as the humility and devotion expected of us on that great occasion. To this horrible crime the Spirit of God, speaking by St. Paul, threatens damnation: 'Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of this bread, and drink of this cup; for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself not discerning the Lord's body;' and if he repents not, must surely perish. The best man stands in continual need of this examination, because, let his life be ever so free from sin, he is not to look on himself as absolutely safe. He is therefore by no means to venture on small sins, in hopes to check and stop himself, before he proceeds to greater. There are certain occasions, wherein even a good man may as well hope to restrain the winds and storms, as his passions, once they are let loose. The enormity of great sins keeps recollection always awake in a conscientious mind. But small offences, which the tempter makes use of as steps to the greatest crimes, are too easily overlooked, and lost in our account. Here therefore a daily examination becomes

necessary. Now such examinations ought to be quickened with this alarming consideration, that he who tolerates in himself the committal of small sins, hath reason to fear lest God should desert him, as one who presumptuously sets up his own strength, and gives himself a dispensation in things forbidden by God.

Having now seen how much depends on our examining ourselves by the articles of our covenant; how often and how solemnly we are called to this necessary work of self-inspection; and that in case we neglect it, we either give up our covenant with God, or attempt to renew it by a crime as provoking in his sight, as any other that can make a renewal requisite; need I farther press you to the duty? If this is not sufficient, what can the wit of man, or even the word of God, say more to move you?

I cannot, however, proceed, without making one remark on the present general inattention to the Christian covenant, at which, I fear, few ears in this congregation will not have reason to tingle. If infinite numbers, professing Christianity in words, do flatly deny it in their actions; if they give God only the service of their lips, while all they think, or do, demonstrates a close league between them and his enemy, we must conclude, their covenant with God is utterly dissolved, and wrath, fourfold wrath, renewed. God is not a man, that he should be deceived by mere appearances; nor will his infinite majesty suffer itself to be mocked with the empty formality of a covenant, with the sprinkling of water, and the swallowing of bread and wine, which are but the outward signs and shadows of the sacraments: no, his sacraments are inward things, spiritual instruments, whereby the heart must be purified, and the affections exalted, and placed on things above, the manners reformed, and the whole man consecrated, in the ardours of a rational and lively devotion to the service of God. On whom hath the covenant this effect? In whom is it a motive of the smallest consequence to a good life? Who remembers that heaven and hell depend on his contract with God; that he cannot transgress it without treachery, rebellion, and perjury; or that if he does, he is again where his degenerate nature placed him, that is, in a state of enmity with an Almighty Being? Of all things it is most absolutely neces-

sary to every Christian, that he should fix his attention strongly and constantly on the awful covenant between God and him. Here he must look for both the rules and motives of his duty. Here he must look for the laws by which he is to be judged. On the observation of this should he build all his hopes; and from the transgression of it, derive all his fears. It should therefore be written, not on the lintels and posts of his door, but on his heart, that it may be ready on all occasions to unmask his enemies, and their arts; that it may rise with every passion and affection; that it may present itself to his apprehensions with every temptation. Instead of this, (how can we speak of it without horror?) this sacred covenant, this solemn vow, this blessed peace, purchased with the blood of our Redeemer, and enriched with the glorious inheritance of heaven, is either never thought of, or thought of as an empty ceremony. Hence all the wickedness of the Christian world, and the loss of all those souls that carry the name of Christ, and yet travel downward on the broad way to destruction. But enough of this shocking subject.

Having said what I thought necessary on the duty of self-examination, and the great danger of unworthily receiving the sacrament of the Lord's supper, in order to prevent that sin; it is now time to say something concerning the sin and danger of neglecting to receive that sacrament.

But here it will be proper to observe, that the duty of receiving is founded on an express commandment of Christ; and is therefore bound on our consciences, not only by the divine authority of the Lawgiver, but by the force of our baptismal vow, which obliges us to keep all the commandments of God. Now, although the Scriptures have no where told us, how often in our lives, or in each particular year we are to receive this sacrament, perhaps because it is an act of gratitude, and therefore, so far, best left to our own discretion and voluntary acknowledgments; yet we may easily gather, both from the nature of the thing, and from the word of God, that we ought to receive as often as we have an opportunity, that is, as often as it is administered in the place where we live.

This must undoubtedly be our duty, if the sacrament of the Lord's supper is considered as a repetition and renewal

of our covenant with God; because we daily transgress the covenant more or less, and thereby proportionably revive the natural enmity between God and us; from whence it will follow, that if he is pleased, in his infinite compassion for our infirmities, to indulge us, by any means, the recovery of peace and favour with him, we must be extremely wanting, both in our duty to him and ourselves, if we do not fly to those means, as often as they are afforded. To decline this is, for the time, either to slight the covenant with its privileges, or to neglect the safety of our own souls; it is to declare for our sins, and against God; it is to renew the peace with them, and the war with him. It is true, there is no man hardy enough to mean all this by his not receiving; but every one, who is guilty of this sin, knows full well the heinousness and danger of it, as here set forth; and all the excuse to be made for him is, that he does not think it worth his while to trouble himself much about either; that is, it is a matter of no great consequence to him, whether he is at peace or war with God; but in the mean time, of the two, he prefers the latter, because otherwise he cannot enjoy the pleasures of sin; he cannot pursue his lusts, his resentments, his fraudulent schemes. Well, but he does not take the thing in this light; he is inattentive and thoughtless on on the subject. Thoughtless! what, about his vow! about peace with the God of vengeance! How can he be thoughtless, when heaven and hell are at stake! How dare he be thoughtless, when God is concerned! Does he shew himself so stupid about worldly affairs? How often did he lose a shilling, or a bottle of wine, merely for want of thought? When did he lose the friendship of a superior by failing to dine with him on the day of invitation? Men may talk lightly, and think more lightly than they talk, on a subject of this kind; but it is impossible they should ever do so, without a strong tincture of practical Atheism at the bottom; for where there is but a very low degree of faith, such points, although ever so faintly believed, are of a nature too interesting, and too alarming, to be trifled with in such a manner. He, then, who makes a practice of absenting himself from the Lord's table, is a covenant-breaker, is not at peace with God, is cut off from Christ; and whether he fortifies himself, for the present, against compunction, in want of thought, or in a

wrong way of thinking, he will one day find, that God is not to be trifled with; and that despair itself had been better, than his present senseless calm of mind. While he wilfully absents himself from the Lord's table, he loses sight of himself, and of the covenant; and which way he is going, whether upward or downward, he neither can possibly know, nor does he care: all he can know is, that he is not in his duty to God, or his soul: but on this glimpse of knowledge he will not dwell, lest it should give him a view of his danger, and disturb him in his course of sin. Imagination cannot conceive a mind in a more shocking situation than this, wherein the whole of religion hath lost its hold on the conscience; and conscience its influence over the conduct of the man.

The next thing, which should make us constant communicants, is, the consideration, that this sacrament is the food of the soul. The soul as well as the body, hath its proper health and life, which depend on sustenance peculiar to it. Its health consists in piety and virtue; its life in peace with God. The food, necessary to keep it in a healthful state, is the grace of God, communicated to it through the covenant, by his word and in his ordinances; particularly this sacrament, which our Saviour assures us, 'is meat indeed, and drink indeed,' for the soul. By self-examination we know when we want, and when we are fit to receive, this food; by meditation we digest it; and by the discharge of our duty in all its branches, of faith and obedience towards God, of charity and justice towards men, and of vigilence and purity in ourselves, we exercise the principles and powers that are fed by the spiritual nourishment.

Now he, who knows any thing of his own mind, must be sensible, his piety and virtue cannot long subsist on one meal, no more than the health and strength of his body. If vigilence and self-examination are, for a considerable time omitted, temptations will steal in, and repeated sins swell the account against him. Hence bad habits, like weeds, will spring up, and choke the good seed sown in his heart. In the mean time his devotions cool, his resolutions flag, and the portion of grace he had received, insensibly dies away for want of new recruits. Hence also an habitual distaste and disrelish of every thing that is good arises, and throws the soul

into a sickly and languishing condition. Infinite wisdom and goodness hath given us the sacrament of the Lord's supper, as the grand remedy against both these evils. The examinations, the meditations, the resolutions, it calls us to, turning on the great points of faith, repentance, and charity, to which we are bound by covenant and vow, are wonderfully fitted to prepare us for; and the grace of God, on which we feed in this holy ordinance, is equally well calculated to stay us up in, that healthful and happy frame of mind, to which eternal life is promised, and indeed naturally annexed. 'This is the bread which came down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread,' saith Christ, 'which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.' What tongue of men, or angels, is able to express the benefit and necessity of this sacrament in words so strong as these? The spiritual health, and eternal life of the soul, are here represented, as depending absolutely on it. We live for ever, if we receive this food; we perish for ever, if we do not. We are united to Christ, if we take this holy sacrament; we are cut off from him, if we decline it. But may not one receiving answer the end? Can one meal of ordinary food support our bodies during a life of seventy years? Why is this holy ordinance at all repeated, if once receiving will do? I have already shewn the use of this sacrament, as a continuation of the covenant, and as the food for the soul, by such reasons, and by such expressions of our blessed Saviour, as cannot possibly deceive us. Considered therefore in either light, it cannot be too often repeated. We cannot too often examine the state of our own minds. We cannot too often repent of our sins, and resolve to lead a better life. We cannot too often renew and confirm our covenant of peace with God. We cannot too often, nor too plentifully, receive the grace, or spiritual sustenance, on which the health and life of our souls

depend. We cannot therefore too often, nor too carefully, nor too devoutly, receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper.

The third consideration, arising from the nature of this sacrament, and calling us to constant communion, is gratitude for the death of our Redeemer, whereby we were bought, as with a price, from the eternal punishment of sin. This was the comprehensive, this the tender and affecting end, for which he instituted his last supper. I say comprehensive, because it is impossible gratefully to commemorate the death of Christ, without answering, at the same time, all the other ends of the institution. He who receives this sacrament, before he hath deligently examined himself by the articles of the covenant, and found his heart animated with a settled hatred of sin, and a firm resolution to glorify his Redeemer by a new life and conversation, and his understanding thoroughly convinced of the fundamental truths taught him by the holy Scriptures, instead of shewing himself grateful, or doing any honour to his Saviour, does but 'put him to open shame,' does but 'crucify him afresh,' and is therefore 'guilty of the body and blood of the Lord,' because he rends his body, and pours out his blood, like a Jew, without faith, without love, without repentance, and reformation of manners. I likewise call the grateful commemoration of Christ's death an affecting end of this sacred institution, because, being about to die for us, he ordained this holy sacrament, and said, 'This do in remembrance of me; as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death, till he come.' A worthy mind is ever on the watch for opportunities of testifying its gratitude for the favours it hath received. If those favours are such as it can never possibly repay; if they are too great to be returned; and if the benefactor either cannot, or will not, admit a benefit by way of requital; how is the greatful heart pained and distressed under the sense of so much goodness, till the benefactor is pleased to appoint some method, by which its thanks may be expressed! This is exactly the case between Christ, and his grateful disciple. Christ died the reproachful and painful death of a slave, to save the Christian from the eternal punishment of his sins, and to bring him to that endless happiness and glory, which no human righteousness can ever merit. This obligation the Christian can never

pay. But were the obligation small enough in itself to be returned by man, yet how could the return be made to Christ, who is God, and consequently can receive no benefit from his creatures? Here the infinite benefactor, unwilling to encourage the ingratitude of some, or too much to distress the generous hearts of others, by shutting the door against all acknowledgments, says, 'As I am going to die for you all, I desire you may all eat this bread, in remembrance of my body torn, and drink this wine, in remembrance of my blood spilt, for your sins. Do this to shew forth my death, and to prove you do not forget my friendship for you, till I return again to bring you away from this lower world into that heavenly inheritance, which the sacrifice of my blood entitles you to. If you really love me, as often as you see this bread broken, you will think you see my flesh shivering in the agonies of death, and torn to pieces on the cross, to prepare it for the sustenance of your souls; and as often as you see this wine poured out, your affection and gratitude will represent it to your hearts, as that blood which streamed from my wounds to wash away all sin from your souls. But you know, dearly beloved, for whom I am laying down my life, that I am led to my cross by your sins, and the infidel cruelty of my enemies. When therefore you come to this costly banquet of my flesh and blood, if you have any love for me, or sense of what I suffer in your stead, do not bring with you either unbelief or sin, lest I understand you as coming to crucify me afresh; lest in you I see another Judas and his band, another Caiaphas, another Pilate. I do not tell you how often I require this proof of your gratitude: I leave that to the thankful notions of your own hearts. But, if as often as you think fit thus to acknowledge my kindness, you do it with that affection, that sorrow for your sins, and that trust in my services and promises, which I require, you shall dwell in me, I will dwell in you; and eternal love shall so unite us into one happy and immortal body, that where I am, there shall you be also; and neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate you from the love of my Father, which manifests, and will for ever manifest, itself towards you, in me your Lord and Saviour.'

Is he now a Christian who can be deaf to such an address? Who can coldly comply with, or flatly refuse, such an invitation? Who hath baseness enough to say within himself, or brutality enough even to say to others, 'I do not intend to communicate more than once or twice a year; perhaps I shall not prevail on myself to do it so often. It is true, when I do attend this duty, I lay out but a small portion of two or three days in preparing for it; yet this gives so painful an interruption to the pursuits my heart is engaged in, that I cannot think of going about this business, either more frequently or more warmly.' Now compare this with the address of our blessed Saviour, that you may suppose it, as is really the case, returned by way of answer to that address; and then tell us whether you can conceive human nature, or any thing short of the diabolical, capable of a more detestable, or a more infernal, degree of ingratitude. Were the man absolutely an Atheist, he could never think of coming to the Lord's table at all. What then (in the name of wonder), is he? Is he a Christian? Does he hope for salvation through the death of Christ? Good God! How then can he answer his Saviour in such a manner? Or with what enormous impudence can he hope, that attendance, so cold, so forced, so seldom paid, can pass on the searcher of hearts for gratitude, for gratitude under the weight of such infinite obligations? But why do I thus lash this wretch? The ungrateful cannot be obliged, cannot be served, cannot be saved.

Beside these reasons for frequent communion, arising from the nature of the institution itself, there is another of no less force and better qualified to shew how often we ought to communicate, drawn from the practice of the apostolic age, and of that which followed for some hundreds of years. The apostles, who were guided immediately by the Spirit of God, could not have been mistaken in a thing of this consequence; nor could the primitive fathers, who pursued the example of the apostles. Now St. Luke informs us, it was the custom of the disciples to come together on the first day of the week to break bread, which is the expression he uses to signify the celebration of the Lord's supper. From whence it appears, they performed this solemnity once a week. Nay, it seems, they did it much of-

tener; for we find, 'they continued daily in the temple, and also broke bread from house to house;' from which it is natural to conclude, that, as often as any number of them met at one another's houses, which was almost every day, they constantly went to prayers, and celebrated this sacrament. This holy practice had not ceased in St. Cyprian's time; for he says, 'we daily receive the eucharist, as the food which nourishes us to salvation;' nay, we find it still alive as far down as the days of St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, and St. Augustin, in the western churches; and, as to the eastern churches, whose piety began sooner to cool, St. Basil says, they communicated four times a week, and oftener, if the festival of any martyr called them together.

Their practice also instructs us in another point of great moment, relating to this awful institution; namely, that they not only denied communion to all open offenders, as we see by the instance of the incestuous person among the Corinthians, but also threatened all such with excommunication, as came to the public place of worship, and did not stay to receive the Lord's supper, as we see by the apostolic canons, and the synod of Antioch. If any man in health should but once absent himself from this solemnity on the Lord's day, he was regarded by all the Christians of his acquaintance as an infamous person, whose secret sins had cut him off from the body of Christ. Such were the customs in relation to this sacred and solemn ordinance, that arose from the immediate directions of the Holy Spirit.

Let us now ask ourselves, whether we think this sacrament is a different thing in these days from what it was in the purer ages of the church? Whether we stand in less need of the grace communicated by it, than the primitive Christians did? Whether our acknowledgments are not as often due, as theirs, for the death of Christ? Or whether it can be rationally supposed, that our practice comes nearer to the design of our blessed Saviour, than that which flowed from the immediate dictates of his Holy Spirit? The right answers to these questions will condemn the usage, in this behalf, of every church now on earth. In what an unworthy light must the present professors of Christianity stand, when so few can be found among the largest and best congregations, who are willing to communicate once a month;

when the second class, far more numerous than this, content themselves with receiving once or twice a year; and when the remainder, which makes a greater body, than both the other put together, are hardly ever prevailed on to receive at all? Hath this the air of gratitude, of piety, of Christianity? No, the true Christian, and the constant communicant, ever were, and still are, but one and the same thing.

But farther, since not to receive this holy sacrament is excommunication, let us ask ourselves, whether it is worse to be excommunicated by the church, which may be mistaken in its censures; or by the deadness of our own hearts, and the clamorous guilt of our consciences, where there is not the same room for an erroneous sentence? Whosoever refuses to receive, be the excuses he makes what they will, is certainly self-condemned of ingratitude towards his Saviour, or of infidelity, or of some secret enormities unreformed, or of rancour in regard to his neighbour; perhaps of all; and therefore self-excommunicated. As to his receiving once or twice a year, or, it may be, but once in several years, it can only serve to rise in judgment against his infamous neglect at other times; for why should not the same reasons that brought him once to the Lord's table, bring him on all other occasions when it is spread for him? If he can receive at a great festival, why not at another time? Do his acknowledgments depend on the calendar? Is he only annually a Christian? Or are the fits of his devotion periodical, like those of an old ague? A covenant, so seldom remembered, can by no means preserve the peace between God and his soul. Accounts, so seldom examined and cleared, must lie in the utmost confusion, and swell, in time, beyond a possibility of being settled or balanced. So long a fast from spiritual food must starve the vital principle in the soul, and, in all probability, reduce it to an incapacity of being revived.

Such are the reasons, to which many more might be added, for frequency of communion. But I cannot conclude, nor dismiss the subject of this sacrament, without a remark, that, if I mistake not, does more honour both to the institution itself, and the wisdom of its author, than any other, and may serve at the same time briefly to remind you of all that hath been said.

Although the sacrament of the Lord's supper hath its own peculiar ends, such as the commemoration of Christ's death, communion with the head and members of the church, ratification of the covenant, participation of grace, and the like; yet none of these is the ultimate end of this institution, which, like all other parts of our religion, pursues, through its own immediate ends, the grand, the common end of Christianity, to wit, the glory of God in the salvation of souls. And this it does in a way altogether worthy of that infinite wisdom, to which it owes its appointment; for while, on the one side, it is no less than death to the soul to neglect it, on the other, it is damnation to receive it unworthily, that is, without faith, reformation of manners, and charity both towards God and man. Thus it fences our way to happiness on each hand; and, inasmuch as it is continually to be attended, keeps the articles of our covenant, the death of Christ, the necessity of a good life, the mercies and judgments of God, heaven, hell, and, in a word, every principle, every motive, of Christianity, always strongly in view. Besides this, it maintains a constant intercourse between God, and the soul of each regular communicant, by the grace, mercy, and peace, which God confers on it; and by the self-examination, vigilance, and devotion, which the worthy receiver, without intermission, exercises in order to a right attendance on this important solemnity. Considered in this light, it abridges and braces on the conscience all the means of salvation; it concentres all the instruments, ends, and purposes, of Almighty God towards man, contained in our holy religion. Considered in any lower light, in that particularly, wherein a late writer hath endeavoured to represent it, to the eye of common sense it dwindles into an empty ceremony, as little capable of doing honour to the wisdom of its author, as of promoting the piety and virtue of mankind.

Let us therefore, to conclude, give a close attention to this most useful and awful institution; let us constantly attend it, and on all occasions, with deep and ardent devotions, apply it to the blessed purposes, for which it was ordained; ever carefully recollecting, that we cannot neglect it, without danger of death to our souls; nor unworthily receive it, without danger of damnation.

And may its blessed founder be graciously pleased to assist our endeavours herein with his Holy Spirit, and to accept of them, for the sake of those merits, on which our hopes of eternal peace and life are grounded. Now, to the ever-blessed and glorious Trinity, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, from henceforward for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXIII.

THE REWARD ANNEXED TO THE CHRISTIAN COVENANT.

COLOSS. III. 2.

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

WHEN we consider how infinitely different the things above, and the things on earth, here spoken of, are; how sensible and gross the one, how spiritual and pure the other; it may seem a little surprising, that the same affections should be capable of a relish for both; or rather, as we have them from the fleshly part of our nature, that they should have any inclination at all to objects purely spiritual. But we find they really have, when such objects are proposed to the understanding, as infinitely better than the proper objects of sense, and recommended through that to our affections under the shadow and figure of such sensible enjoyments, as impart to the soul the most pure and exalted kind of pleasure. Our Maker, having intended us for a progress through both worlds, hath fitted us to either. In this respect, as well as in the make and carriage of our bodies, although our feet are placed on earth, our heads are erected towards the heavens.

Whether, however, our chief attention ought to look upward, or downward, reason is to determine, according to the lights and prospects afforded it from either quarter. God intended we should be moved by our affections, but guided by our understandings. Yet the affections, though blind, will not always suffer themselves to be led. The judgment

indeed interposes on most occasions, and asserts its right of dictating to the will; yet unless it is seconded by the heart, it is overruled, or but half obeyed; whereas affection, without, or even against reason, can often produce very earnest pursuits, and vigorous actions. When the affections go foremost in the conduct of any man, he is, for the time, no better than a brute. His very nature is inverted; and reason in him is of no other use, than to make him a little more ingeniously foolish, more regularly mad and wicked.

If it is asked, how a rational creature should ever act against reason; experience readily answers, man cannot help pursuing his own supposed happiness, and flying from that which he thinks will make him miserable. Now, it is through his affections chiefly that he enjoys, or suffers; and therefore it is no wonder, if they assume a very extraordinary sway within him. Besides, their motions from one object, and to another, are generally so sudden and violent, that reason hath not time to interfere, till they are become too strong to be controlled. They give pleasure, and we follow; or they give pain, and we fly; before it is well considered, whether we should do either; for all is not good, that pleases; nor all evil, that disgusts. Hence it is manifest, that judgment is necessary to turn the affections away from that which is really evil, and to point them towards that which is really good. With the heat and vehemence that is natural to them, whether they are directed or not, they always move swiftly, and tend strongly, after the present appearance, whereon they are fixed. If in any man right reason, duly enlightened, hath the guidance and government of the affections, he must be happy; because he must be good: but if his affections are left to themselves, he must be wicked; and he who is wicked, must be miserable. If they are chained down to earthly things, and pent in to fleshly objects, they turn his heart into a fiery furnace, resembling the place of the damned, inhabited only by that which is foul and miserable; but, if they aspire towards things above, they blaze forth in kindly heat, and beautiful light; which refine as they ascend, till they mix with their kindred element in God.

All mankind are in pursuit of either real or mistaken happiness, and flying from such appearances of evil, as pre-

sent themselves to their affections and passions. All our labours of body, and anxieties of mind, all our arts and schemes, all the risks we run on sea, or in battle, the profuseness of one, and the frugality of another, the activity of this, and the indolence of that, the honesty or knavery, the commerce, and the policy; in short, the whole importance, and struggle, and bustle of the world, is in order to one or other of these two great ends; to obtain some good, or avoid some evil; and proceeds altogether from our affections.

In the midst of all this hurry, and an infinite variety of solicitation made to our senses and desires by the things here below, religion steps in, and bids us set our affections on certain things above, which it proposes to be first examined by our understandings, and, if approved of, to be closed with on the part of our desires. These things are God and heaven, in the enjoyment of which to all eternity consists the chief, if not the only, happiness of man. Give me leave to propose this to you as the subject of the present Discourse.

A subject so copious and important can never be exhausted, can never be brought too often under consideration. Besides, as it is of all others infinitely the most delightful, no frequency of meditation can render it disagreeable or insipid to a mind that either aspires to great things, or has any taste of true pleasure.

As the proposal is made us by God himself, and founded on our own nature, I shall single out the several notions by which it is represented and conveyed to us in his holy Scriptures; and, one by one, illustrate and enforce them as well as I can.

The first representation of our happiness after death, I shall take notice of, is, that of rest. In the fourteenth of St. John's Revelation it is said by a voice from heaven, and by the Spirit of God, that 'the dead, which die in the Lord, are blessed;' and that 'they rest from their labours.' In the fourth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle, having formed an allegory between the promise of a temporal rest given to the Israelites, and of a spiritual given to Christians, says, 'There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God;' and 'let us therefore labour to enter into that rest.' Christ, in the eleventh of St. Matthew, calls this

'a rest for the soul.' Job says, it is 'a rest for the weary;' and Isaiah, speaking even of its commencement in this life, calls it, 'a glorious rest.'

It was the curse inflicted on all mankind, upon the fall of our first parents, that they should 'eat bread in the sweat of their face, till they should return unto the ground.' 'All things,' says the preacher, 'are full of labour; man cannot utter it.' But in Christ's kingdom the righteous shall find a glorious and eternal rest for their souls. No anxieties of mind, nor toils of body, shall follow us into that happy place of ease and repose. The weary shall no more stoop under his burden; nor he that was stunned with the bustle of this world, any more hear the clamour of the crowd, nor be tossed in an ocean of business, like a bubble amidst the froth of a whirlpool. His soul shall enjoy a perfect calm, undisturbed by passions or cares. In this profound silence, his will shall listen to his reason, and his reason to the soft whispers of nature, and the still voice of God.

In the next place, the condition of the happy is set forth in the holy Scriptures under the notion of peace. 'Mark the perfect man,' says David in the thirty-seventh psalm; 'and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.' Isaiah says in the fifty-seventh chapter, that 'the righteous is taken away from the evil to come, and that he shall enter into peace.' The just and devout Simeon, to whom it had been revealed, that 'he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ,' taking the child Jesus in his arms, cried out, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.'

By our natural birth we are born to enmity with God, and though by religious birth in baptism, that enmity in our flesh is abolished, yet we are then enlisted into the service of God against a powerful combination of enemies; namely, the world, the flesh, and the devil; whose continual assaults keep us actually in a state of war from thenceforward to the hour of our death. But then it is, that after having fought a good fight of faith, we enter into true peace; a peace which those enemies shall no longer be able to disturb. There shall be no evil principles to combat the good, nor inordinate passions to make war on each other or on our reason; no error to kindle vain disputes; no ambition, nor

avarice, to stir up strife and rage. Anger, and wrath, and clamour, and evil-speaking, with every malicious passion, every surly and jealous humour, that shuts our hearts against each other in this life, being then put far away from us, calm thoughts and benevolent dispositions, shall succeed into their place ; and open our affections to all the infinite sweets of love and friendship from our fellow-creatures, and favour from God. With what a glow of tenderness must it warm a benevolent heart, to see the generous love that unites the 'spirits of good men made perfect;' to see those souls, who perhaps in this life contended bitterly about the trifles of this world, meeting like 'righteousness and peace, and kissing each other;' to see them strike hands, and unite hearts, for ever!

Again, the happiness of the next life is represented to us in holy Scripture as a treasure. Our Saviour bids us 'lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.' He desired the rich young man to 'sell all he had;' and told him, that 'he should have treasure in heaven.' Again he assures his disciples, that 'every one, who had forsaken houses or lands for his name's sake, should receive an hundred fold, and inherit everlasting life.'

The riches of this world generally cost us much more than they are worth; and even when we have obtained them, we have no certain hold of them; 'they make themselves wings, and fly away;' or although they should not, death soon removes us from them, and 'we cannot tell who shall gather them.' The greater part of human understanding, and worldly wisdom, is laid out in making fortunes and raising families. How do the living magnify this kind of wisdom! How do the dead repent of it or deride it! How like a child the rich man falls, and scatters all his collection of baubles! And how like children do those about him scramble for the trifles!

It is not so with the riches of heaven. They last for ever. There are no thieves, no moths, nor worms, no accidents nor deaths, to take them from us. Our 'spiritual house' with all its rich treasures and shining ornaments, 'is eternal in the heavens.' Its everlasting foundations are laid on the firm rock of God's promises; its stately structure rises

among the beautiful buildings of the new Jerusalem; its walls sparkle with jasper, and its floors shine with 'gold transparent like glass.'

The riches of this world are poverty; for he who has the most of them still wants more. In heaven only there is enough. The wealthiest monarch in this world must rob a beast, a bird, or a worm, to make himself gay; and after all 'is not as fine as the lily.' But those who are thought worthy to attend in the train of the Lamb, shall be clothed in garments whose whiteness and lustre not eternity itself can tarnish. The wealthiest of men can only feed on the earth, in common with brutes and worms. But those who shall be received into the new Jerusalem, shall drink out of that 'river of life that flows from the throne of God, whose waters are clear as crystal;' and shall eat 'the fruit of that tree of life, whose very leaves heal the nations.'

Again, the happiness of heaven is represented to us, under the notion of pleasure. We are told in the sixteenth psalm, that 'at the right hand of God, where the righteous are placed, are pleasures for evermore;' and in the thirty-sixth psalm, that his 'faithful people shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of his house, and shall be made to drink of the river of his pleasures.'

The pleasures of this life seldom satisfy; and when they do they surfeit. They enfeeble the body. They relax the very soul. Corruption and shame are mixed up with their nature. They begin in anxiety, and end in repentance. They were given us to answer certain ends in this present state; but we pursue them beyond those natural ends, to our own confusion and ruin. As soon as this life shall cease, then cease also all those pleasures that are peculiar to it; for in another life we shall be as the angels in heaven. As their happiness is of a purely spiritual and celestial nature, so shall ours be. It shall be such as seraphims can partake in; such as we can, without shame, enjoy in the sight of God. It shall in short, be such as the soul, renewed and strengthened in all its powers, and enlarged in its capacity, can injoy. One moment of such enjoyment would overpower and dissolve our nature, in its present infirmity. But when we shall have 'put on immortality,' the delights of heaven, instead of impairing, shall refresh the faculties that

are to enjoy them; for such is constantly the effect of intellectual pleasures even here. They never pall, they leave no satiety nor distaste behind them; but whet the mind to farther desires, and feed the very soul itself, as it were with new life. But in heaven they will be as various, as boundless, as endless, as glorious, as the objects to be enjoyed.

Again, our future happiness is represented to us under the notion of power and dominion. We are told in the forty-ninth psalm, that 'the upright shall have dominion over the wicked in the morning;' that is, in the resurrection. 'I appoint unto you a kingdom,' says Christ to his disciples, in the twenty-second of St. Luke's Gospel. In the second of the epistle general of St. James, those 'who are rich in faith are said to be heirs of the kingdom, which God hath promised to them that love him.'

There is in man a natural desire of power which, degenerating into ambition in this life, amuses itself with such a shadow of power, as the little principalities and petty sovereignties of this world set before it.

But in the life to come the soul having the full use of all its faculties, and being able to govern itself, shall be exalted to a post of trust and power, equal to its high endowments. We find in the tenth of Daniel, that nations had their guardian angels to rule over them; and nothing can better agree with nature and reason than the supposition of such a guardianship. It is not likely that the blessed consume the whole length of eternity in continual hymns, and inactive contemplations. It is infinitely more likely, that they have certain stations assigned them, where in subordination to the King of kings, they bear mighty rule, and execute great things; where they combat the great dragon, and the powers of darkness; where whole nations and perhaps worlds, are committed to their care and protection; where, in gratitude to their infinite Benefactor, and out of love to their fellow-creatures, they rejoice to carry on the glorious schemes of Providence, to promote virtue, to suppress vice, to crowd the kingdom of their great master with happy beings like themselves. It is on account of that employment that they are called, in the epistle to the Hebrews, 'ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.' The unexpected reformation of parti-

cular persons, and the unaccountable revolutions in kingdoms, are probably brought about by these invisible agents, who at one time promote the liberty and wealth of a virtuous people, and at another, pour out the phials of God's fury on a degenerate age, or a guilty nation.

Again, the happiness of our new state is recommended to us by the promise of honour and glory. 'Glory, honour, and peace,' are promised 'to every one that worketh good. They that have the true wisdom, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars, for ever and ever,' says Daniel. 'Blessed is the man,' says St. James, 'that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.' St. Paul 'reckoned, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed;' and he tells us in another place that, 'when the veil shall be taken away, we shall all, with open face beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, be changed into the same image,' still improving and rising from glory to glory. How does it dilate the heart, and exalt our thoughts, to look forward at that happy time, when we shall rise from the earth, like a bed of new-blown flowers, and laying by all our load of 'corruption, dishonour, weakness, and mortality,' shall clothe ourselves with 'incorruption, glory, power, and immortality?' If as our Saviour tells us, 'we shall be as angels in heaven,' then shall we resemble him, who in the tenth of Daniel, appeared with 'a body like beryl, with a face as the appearance of lightning,' with 'eyes as lamps of fire, with arms and feet in colour like polished brass, and with a voice when he spoke, like the voice of a multitude.' Nay, the excellence and lustre of our persons shall be even greater than this; for this was only a visible clothing, put on to shadow the greater glories of his spiritual person. Yet, in comparison of this, the splendour of earthly thrones and crowns is tinsel, and their pomp pageantry. Could such a being be but for a moment placed in the same view with the most magnificent emperor in his trappings of state, it would eclipse all his splendour, and turn his finery to rags, to sackcloth and ashes.

Again, the conversation of angels, and good men made

perfect, will make no inconsiderable part of our happiness in heaven. Our fellow labourers here are to be our co-heirs and fellow-citizens in that glorious kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Even while we live here, we in some sense have our conversation in heaven. But as 'soon as we come to mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,' we shall then have the full relish and enjoyment of that celestial conversation. Then those benevolent beings, who during our warfare below, looked down with attention on our trials, perhaps frequently lent us a friendly hand, though unseen, in our dangerous encounters with our baptismal enemies, who, after our lapses, made a jubilee upon our rising and repenting, will pay us a kind and joyful welcome on our safe arrival among them.

What delight must it not give to a generous and benevolent nature, to find itself in such company, and among such friends! to perceive in itself a due relish for their conversation, and an understanding capable of bearing a part in it!

Among this glorious company there is none who does not contribute largely to the satisfaction and entertainment of the rest. There is no weak reasoning, nor biassed judging; no tedious searching after knowledge; no ill-natured ridicule; no trifling, nor impertinence; no pride, nor jealousy, nor envy. The powers of their understandings being greatly improved and enlarged, and their sentiments and affections refined, produce a conversation truly significant and noble. Their faculties are prodigiously capacious, and yet filled with the knowledge of great and wonderful things. Their fancies, full of beautiful and lofty images, furnish their discourses with a dress infinitely entertaining and sublime. Each, happy in himself, and filled with such love to all the rest, as none but the tongue of angels can utter, imparts joy and wonder at every word. What imagination can conceive the ardours of a friendship excited by beauty and excellence like theirs! or the mutual returns of love from generosity so exalted! or the glorious rebounds of entertainment from understandings so perfect, so full; so fruitful of sentiments great, good, and heavenly, like the minds in which they are formed!

Farther, the contemplation of God's works makes a delightful article in our eternal happiness. 'The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. How manifold are his works! in wisdom hath he made them all.' As a good mind is naturally led to meditate on the works of God in this life, where we see so short a way, and know so little; we may presume, that, when our senses and faculties shall be enlarged, and the universe opened to our range of observation, we shall then make surprising discoveries, and delight to lose ourselves in the contemplation of infinite wonders.

In this world we are confined to one corner, as it were, of the creation; and our narrow senses afford us but a scanty prospect into the rest. We see a few of the next stars, or neighbouring worlds, that lie round us, and those so very imperfectly, that they appear but like so many scattered sparks of fire. What fills the boundless residue of infinite space, we know not. But we may be sure, that there also infinite wisdom, goodness, and power, have been employed, and are there obeyed and praised. If it is extremely agreeable to travel from one country to another on the surface of this world, what would it be to visit and survey the curiosities of other worlds, to outstrip the light, on the swift wings of contemplation, in the search of nature! The objects of wonder, the beauty, the magnificence, even here, in a place of trial, are not to be expressed; but how much greater must they be in a state intended for reward, in the more immediate residence of God!

What infinite entertainment must it afford to look into the causes of things; to see on what the 'foundations of the earth are laid;' to enter into 'the springs of the sea, and the treasures of the snow and hail;' to see what it is, that gives the thunder its resistless force, and its loud voice; to see what it is, that moves and guides the heavenly bodies; to 'sing with the morning stars, and shout with the sons of God' for joy at the creation of new worlds; to 'take the harp, with those that have overcome the beast;' and to 'sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb,' saying, 'Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!'

If such are the works of God, what must he be himself! If there is such delight in the contemplation of them, what must there be in the blessed vision of him, when we shall 'behold his glorious face,' and 'see as we are seen!' If the enjoyment of the creature is so great, what must be that of the Creator! If light and beauty are so transporting when only reflected from the works of creation, what must they be in direct perception from the fountain itself!

What unspeakable pleasure is there in living and conversing with a friend who hath done us some great favour! How is this heightened, if he suffered much in doing it! How does our love increase, if he risked his life to save ours! What then must the presence, the smiles, the enjoyment of him be, who made us, who suffered in our nature to save us from eternal death, who hath taken such infinite care to sustain us in all our trials, to defend us in all our dangers; who, in short, has forgiven us such a world of sin, who has crowned us at the last with mercy and loving-kindness, and admitted us into his 'gracious presence,' where 'there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore!' If 'the earth is full of his goodness;' if 'his eyes run to and fro through the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them, whose heart is perfect towards him;' if 'he withholdeth no good thing from them that love him;' if 'he openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing,' even here, where sin is mixed with our best services; how shall we conceive those demonstrations of his goodness, whereof we are to taste in heaven, after sin hath ceased to interpose between his gracious countenance and our souls! Then shall 'we see, as we are seen,' the Father of mercies, the Saviour of souls, the God of all comfort. Then shall we reflect, with gratitude, with love, with delight, exceeding all expression, on the infinite wonders of his goodness, his patience, his tenderness, his pity, towards us. Then shall we cry out, 'Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge, and also of the goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering of God,' who hath 'brought us out of the mire and clay' of our sins; who hath 'set our feet upon the rock' of his promises, 'and ordered our goings;' and who at the last hath spoken peace to our souls, and blessed us with the sight of his glorious face for evermore.

Nothing can give as large a share of excellence and perfection to what it makes as it hath itself; but God's works, being the finite operations of an infinite hand, sink below their Maker to an infinite degree. When he represents himself to us, in holy Scripture, as 'making his chambers in the clouds, and spreading darkness under his feet; as bowing the heavens when he comes down; as making the mountains smoke at his touch, and the earth tremble at his presence; making the clouds his chariots, and flying upon the wings of the wind; as decking himself with light as with a garment, making the heaven his throne, and the earth his footstool;' we are to know, that he speaks in condescension to our weakness, and gives us such notions of his greatness, as we can comprehend. Yet all this, than which we can at present conceive nothing more sublime, is but a dim shadow, and a faint resemblance, either of his own majesty, or the splendour of his court.

How shall the soul of man enter into such a presence! How shall its faculties bear such an ocean of light, or its strength stand one look from infinite majesty! The answer is easy; those looks, which would dissolve or annihilate our present sinful nature, will then impart celestial strength, and eternal life; will, as it were, infuse new being, and refresh the immortal principle. In what an ecstasy of love and gratitude shall the soul be then wrapt up! To what a loud song of thanksgiving shall it tune all its powers! When it goes forth from the presence, how shall it make the celestial courts resound the praises of its Benefactor! With what a voice will it augment the universal hallelujah of angels! As the language of men fails us in our attempt to express the excellence and happiness of angels; so the language of angels, sublime and expressive as it is, can only, like that of children, stammer the praises of the one infinitely great and good. His greatness outstrips all imagination; and his goodness leaves all gratitude and love far behind. While the eye of the soul is turned on heaven, this world seems to dwindle into nothing; but, when that eye is turned on God, heaven itself, with all its created glories of thrones, principalities, dominions, powers, fades away, and looks too small or dim to share its attention.

Amidst all this rapture of happiness and glory, it will

be no small addition, to reflect on its narrow escape from the jaws of eternal death, and the everlasting safety and salvation in which it is placed. Having 'washed its robes, and made them white, in the blood of the Lamb, it shall stand before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. And he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell with it. It shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on it, nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed it, and shall lead it unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from its eyes.'

And hast thou, O thou soul of man! passed through the dangerous trials, the vexations and uncertainties, of a mortal life? Hast thou escaped the horrible regions of fire and darkness? Art thou placed in eternal rest, and peace, and pleasure? Art thou intrusted with a kingdom, and adorned with a crown? Instead of thy former infirmity, art thou now invested with power? For thy humility and meekness under contempt, art thou now, in the sight of heaven, clothed with honour and glory? Does that God, for whom thy heart hath so long pined and panted, with unutterable love now smile upon thee? Does he speak peace to thee? Does he call thee his child? Does he say unto thee, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?' And is this to be thy condition to all eternity? Is the mutual love between God and thee to increase for ever, and so at once to enlarge and ensure thy bliss, that, after a series of ages, impossible to be numbered, thy happiness shall seem to be only in its infancy? Thou hast made a wise purchase of this reversion, although thou hast laid out on it all the mortifications, and fears, and sufferings, to which a life of piety and purity is often exposed here below.

Such is the state of happiness promised to the souls of true Christians in another life, revealed to us in holy Scripture, and traced by undeniable arguments from thence, and from our own nature. This, however, is to be understood as a weak and faint representation of our future happiness, the wonderful circumstances and degrees of which 'no eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.' There are still pleasures and wonders

untold, which it would be as impossible or unlawful to pry into and describe, as those unutterable words which St. Paul heard when 'he was caught up into the third heavens.'

However, we conceive and know enough of the happiness to be enjoyed in Christ's kingdom, to make rational and thinking creatures fling away the toys and trifles of this life, and place their affections on things above. If reason is consulted, surely it will choose the greatest good; surely it will choose an infinite good, rather than an eternal evil. Surely, if we take the measure of our choice from the size of our desires, we shall rather give them objects that can fully satisfy, objects great and endless, like themselves, than meanly stint them to the scanty enjoyments of this life, to the poverty of this world's riches.

Now let no one vainly imagine, that this may be done when he dies; that it will then be time enough for him 'to remove his affections from things on earth, and place them on things above,' when he himself is about to remove. A close pursuit of this world, and the things of it, is utterly inconsistent with the possibility of obtaining the next. If we give up our desires to the possessions or pleasures of our present condition, we shall grow into such a habit of liking and loving them, that, before we go hence, we shall leave ourselves a relish for nothing else; so that we shall miserably hanker after them, and cling to them, even when necessity has laid its iron hand upon us, and is tearing us from them.

And, as for the delights of another life, it is utterly impossible to enjoy them, without training up our affections to an habitual desire of them. If we would enter into this glorious Canaan, we ought to send our affections thither before us, to view its riches, and taste its fruits; to take possession for us, and bring us a sample of its produce. How otherwise shall we know what kind of country it is, or whether it is a more desirable habitation than the wilderness we are in?

An appetite and taste must be acquired, before we can enjoy any thing. There is no enjoyment without love. What we do not love, we do not desire; and what we do not desire, it is impossible we should find any pleasure in. This is not only true, but it is also true, that the enjoyment

of any object is always in an exact proportion to our love of it. Hence a small occasion of pleasure shall afford more satisfaction to some, than a greater; and for this reason, because they love it more.

Were a man who is wedded to this world, and passionately fond of the enjoyments peculiar to it, carried into heaven, he would find nothing there that he could enjoy. He would want affections to taste its pleasures, and senses to perceive its glories. He would find none of his old delights there; no provision for his intemperance; no object for his lewdness, his ambition, his pride, or his avarice. It would be a dull and insipid state to him, a formless void.

How could a wicked man, even if he were in heaven, enjoy the pleasures of contemplation, or entertain himself with the survey and knowledge of nature, who, in the former world, had not observation enough to trace the very being of a God?

How could he relish the pleasures of doing good there, who had spent his former life, and placed his pleasure, in doing evil?

How could he enjoy the fellowship of angels, who had passed a whole life in the company and conversation (if I may be allowed the expression) of worldlings or rakes, and hath now a relish for no other companions?

How could he frame his soul to divine love, and his voice to hymns and hallelujahs, who, during the greater part of his life, had made a jest of devotion, had derided the house of God, and despised his table?

How could he enjoy the blessed vision of God, or rather how could he bear the presence of him, whom he had so ungratefully and impiously offended through the whole course of his life? How could he endure the dreadful look of those eyes that pierce the soul, and see all its secrets; 'in whose sight the stars are not pure;' and 'that cannot look on iniquity?'

It is too manifest to need a farther proof, that heaven itself could afford no enjoyment to a worldly, to a sensual, or a wicked mind. Nay, it is highly probable, that the happy themselves will taste higher or lower degrees of enjoyment, even in heaven, according as they are possessed with greater or lower degrees of divine love. When Christ

shall entertain us in his Father's kingdom with fruit from 'the tree of life,' and 'the new wine,' we shall probably receive a measure of delight proportionable to the appetite we bring with us to the celestial banquet. The soul must have the principle of happiness within itself, or else no occasions of joy from without, be they ever so great, will be able to make it happy.

From hence we may learn the absolute necessity of practising devotion and virtue, and of bending our hearts towards God and heaven, before we leave this world. Let us therefore, with a just contempt for the trifles of this life, the vanity of which we see and know, turn ourselves to the treasures, the delights and glories, of heaven, that are too great to be seen or conceived at present. Let us open our understandings to the great objects of faith, and give them allthe warmth and force of our affections. Let us either forsake the too eager pursuit of this world, and then heaven will of course enter and possess our thoughts; or let us consider seriously what heaven is, and how it is to be obtained; and it will drive out the love of this world, and set us at liberty. Let us fix our eyes, and our whole attention, on the great things that wait for us in the future life; and then we shall neither be immoderately pleased, nor intolerably grieved at whatsoever may happen to us here. The noble elevation of our thoughts will lift us above the power of fortune, above the temptations of sensual pleasures, and the assaults of temporal evils; will bring us, even while alive, near to the boundaries of God's glorious kingdom, and give us some foretaste of our happiness to come.

We deceive ourselves extremely, if we imagine, that eternal happiness, which is proposed to us in such high terms, is to be obtained by slight or feeble endeavours. It is neither a lukewarm devotion, nor a languid zeal; it is neither a cold, nor a forced, attendance on the house or table of God; it is not a life laid out on this world, and ended in a mixture of prayer and terror; it is not a divided service, paid half to God, and half to the devil; it is not a pursuit, in short, too faint and careless to obtain the smallest worldly possession, that will procure for us an eternal crown. No; our endeavours must bear some proportion to that we aim at. The labours by which eternal happiness is obtained are repre-

sented to us in Scripture by climbing 'a steep and narrow path;' by a state of war, in which we are to watch, to contend, and fight; by a race, which, that we may run with the greater strength and swiftness, we must 'lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.' In order to these mighty labours, and this eager and active pursuit, we must, as much as possible, rid ourselves of worldly amusements and hinderances.

What a shame would it be, how bitterly should we for ever curse our desperate folly, should death surprise us pursuing and contending for baubles, and collecting toys, with a crown of infinite glory in view! Let us rather rouse, and betake ourselves to better thoughts, and a sounder mind. Let us shake off all encumbrances. Let us strip ourselves for our course, and with all the activity that our own resolutions, and all the vigour that the grace of God, can give us, let us, 'forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,' press with all our might 'towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus;' to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, let us, in imitation of all good men, render the grateful incense of a good life and conversation here, that we may hereafter join with the happy choir of saints and angels, to sing his glorious praises, for ever.

DISCOURSE XXIV.

THE PUNISHMENT ANNEXED TO THE CHRISTIAN COVENANT.

2 Cor. v. 10, 11.

We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

Men cannot subsist out of society, nor can society subsist without laws and government; nor can the laws and government of men be of any force or use, if they are not founded on, and supported by, the law of God; nor would even the

law of God itself be of any service to this temporal, or to other higher ends, were it not enforced by rewards and punishments.

As, therefore, all goodness, all happiness, here and hereafter, depend absolutely on the hope of a reward, or the fear of a punishment from God, we must conclude, that such rewards and punishments will actually be distributed to all men with infinite justice; and that, as the great Ruler of the world is infinitely wise, these rewards will be so glorious, and these punishments so severe, as to give sufficient weight to a law of such high importance.

Thus speaks reason; and, when the word of God is consulted, it is found to speak in the same strain. The reward of the righteous is described there in terms that express an infinite degree of joy, and everlasting glory; and the punishment of the wicked in such, as may terrify them with the horrible prospect of intolerable misery, and endless disgrace.

Experience forbids us, however, to hope or fear any such happiness or misery in this life; and therefore reason and Scripture bid us expect them in another. As to Scripture, it assures us, that 'God hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness;' and that 'we shall appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we,' who are appointed to preach his word, must, by representing that terror in all the dreadful colours divine truth hath given it, endeavour to 'persuade men;' to persuade them, if we can, to place the terror of God's judgments before their eyes, that they may 'fear and tremble before God continually,' and labour to escape those judgments, by attending to that terror; than which nothing, as the world goes, is more likely to reform their lives.

If you will hear me with attention, and bear the subject with patience, I shall endeavour, with the assistance of God's word, to set forth the certainty, the severity, and the eternity, of those punishments God hath threatened unrepented sin with, in such a manner as may prevent your thinking the time ill-spent, or your fears unnecessarily awakened.

As to the certainty, that God will hereafter 'punish all wickedness and ungodliness of men,' I need not dwell long

on it to a congregation of believers, who are persuaded, that God cannot be wise, just, or powerful, if wickedness, triumphant in this world, and persevered in to the last, shall not be humbled in the next; who know, that we cannot give up this fundamental article of religion, without dethroning the Creator and Governor of the world, and seating either blind fortune, or diabolical malice, in his place.

Hath God employed infinite wisdom and goodness in making the world? and does he employ neither in the government of it? Hath God condescended to form, with such amazing wisdom, not only the plant and the animal, but even the insect, too small to be seen by the naked eye? and hath he no care of what he hath made? Or, is his providence so taken up in directing the course of the seasons, and watching over the minute or inanimate parts of his creation, that there is none left for man, 'whom he hath made only a little lower than the angels,' and to whom he hath put the 'world in subjection?' Does God 'number our hairs?' and will he not register our actions? 'If a sparrow, in value but half a farthing, cannot fall to the ground without the attention' of this universal Father, shall we wink and forget, when the just man perishes in the paws of oppression and persecution? Can so wise, so gracious a Creator, be so unjust and cruel a Governor? No, no; we might, with more reason, argue against the reality of our own being, than against the certainty of those punishments, which, religion tells us, God will, in a future life, inflict on the wicked. Reason is by no means so much concerned to prove, that we exist, as that God is; and that 'he will render to every man according to his deeds; to them, who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man that doth evil.' While we believe in this, we do but believe, what reason and common sense requires, that the moral world is governed by wisdom and goodness equal to those that schemed the natural. But we no sooner look on this as an error, than we regard the whole creation as a vast body of contradictions; than we level ourselves with the beast that perisheth, and God with the author of evil. Let the wicked therefore be assured, that neither

God nor reason hath lied to him, when they told him, he should hereafter suffer the just punishment of his wickedness; and let him now hear, with tingling ears, and a trembling heart, the severity of those torments that await his evil deeds, if he do not speedily and deeply repent of them.

In the first place, he will 'be cut off from God,' and 'shut out from the kingdom of heaven. Then shall he weep, and gnash his teeth,' as our Saviour saith, 'when he sees Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and himself thrust out.' Plotinus, the heathen, says, This alone is sufficient to make a man most miserable. And St. Chrysostom boldly maintains, that to be thus for ever cut off from God, is worse than all the torments of hell. To be finally and irrecoverably separated from God, who is the fountain of all happiness, whose smiles are the light of heaven, and the eternal life of the just, and to be everlastingly banished from the glories of his kingdom, and the blessed society of all that is good, must be considered by those, who have any knowledge or love of God, as inconceivably afflicting. If the old Romans could so highly value the happiness of living in their earthly community, as to make banishment from thence their severest punishment, what must we think of his condition, who, by the decree of infinite wisdom and justice, is forced to turn his back, to all eternity, on God and heaven!

In the second place, the wicked, being thus banished from the presence of God, is not allowed the wretched liberty of ranging through the meanest part of the creation, nor through the blanker regions of boundless space; but is imprisoned 'with the devil and his angels, in everlasting chains.' He, who made no other use of liberty, but to become licentiously wicked, is to be no longer trusted with it. How will his wild ungovernable pride, and other lawless passions, brook a total restraint, and an endless slavery to the most tyrannical of all beings?

But, in the third place, to increase the misery of his confinement, it will be attended with circumstances of shame and disgrace, beyond the power of imagination to conceive. 'He will be raised up,' as Daniel tells us, 'from his sleep in the dust of the earth, to shame, and everlasting contempt;'

to a shameful exposure of all his abominable crimes, though ever so secretly committed; and to a dreadful condemnation in the sight of angels and men. His whole nature, defaced and foul as it was with sin before, will now become tenfold more deformed, and change its already odious appearance into the horrible aspect and figure of a devil.

And then, in the fourth place, lest so hideous a monster should any longer pollute the light, or disgrace the other works of God, 'he shall be cast into outer darkness, into the blackness of darkness,' where he must bid farewell for ever, not only to the glorious light of God's countenance, but to every glimpse of material light from the sun, moon, and stars. When he was alive, he loved darkness, he loved 'the works of darkness;' and now he is to make one endless night of all eternity, which no dawn, no day-spring, shall ever cheer.

In the fifth place, as, during his life, he delighted in no other companions but the wickedest of men, so now he is to have no other in the place of his imprisonment but devils, and men as wicked as devils; for 'he is cast into the lake with the devil, and the beast, and the false prophet;' that is, 'with all the filth and the off-scourings of the moral world.' Here reign the treachery and venom of the old serpent. Here the invidious dispositions, and virulent habits, of each fiend, or fiend-like spirit, shall make him a perfect fagot and fire-brand to all the rest. Here pride, rage, envy, malice, mutual reproach, and mutual revenge, armed with infernal fire, and dragons' stings, will render them the shocking executioners of Almighty vengeance on one another.

In the sixth place, all these frightful circumstances of his misery are to be heightened by guilt and self-reproach, by the bitter after-taste of sin, by the gnawings of that conscious 'worm that dieth not.' When hell arms all its torments against him, this will continually remind him of those enormous crimes for which he suffers; will tell him, that God is just, and force him every moment to repeat the divine sentence against himself. What will it profit him, though the devils should, for a moment, cease to torment him, since he is now a perpetual accuser, tormentor, and devil, to himself?

In the seventh place, his prison is to be 'a lake, a furnace of fire and brimstone, that can never be quenched.' Let him consider, before it is too late, if he cannot endure the effects of fire on the smallest spot of his skin, or in the remotest part of his body, how he will be able to stand the force of so vehement a fire surrounding him on all sides. Let him ask himself, in the words of Isaiah, 'Who shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who shall dwell with everlasting burnings?'

Again, the more effectually to damp our sinful inclinations, the future torments of the damned are represented in holy Scripture, as a 'continual death;' the lake of fire is, in the Revelation, called the 'second death,' that death, to which all are made subject through sin, and from which we are redeemed through faith, by the blood of Christ.

Now, the first death, which lasts but for a very little time, is so shocking to nature, that it is called the king of terrors; and what then must be that death, that is never to have an end? It is a sort of hell to the mind of him who hopes for salvation, even to meditate on the agonies and horrors of dying without end. With what unutterable dread and anguish then ought it to amaze the soul of the guilty, who cannot but look on it as his eternal portion?

Lastly, the sense of God's eternal wrath, considered in itself, will infinitely inflame the miseries of the reprobate. God is present every where, and consequently present to the damned in his indignation and displeasure: 'If,' says David, speaking to God, 'I go down to hell, thou art there also.' We are told in the Scripture, that, 'when the wicked awake to judgment, they will say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?' We see by this, what terrors the very countenance of the Almighty carries in it to the eyes of the guilty. They would be glad to hide themselves at the centre of the earth, from the fierceness of his anger, from those looks of indignation at sin. And even in the place of torment, if it were possible for their eyes to escape his, they would dive to the nethermost hell to do it. But there, to their unspeakable misery, they see; and to their eternal confusion, they are

seen. Yet they are so hardened and lost in sin, that all this serves only to fill them with a dreadful mixture of rage and terror, by which, being driven to an infernal kind of distraction, they fear, and yet rail at, God; they tremble and blaspheme at once.

Who now can bear to dwell on the shocking review of these punishments? How does it terrify the imagination, how does it distress the heart of man, to look down through Scripture into this deep and bottomless abyss of misery, and to hear the weepings, the wailings, the gnashings of teeth, the yells and execrations uttered by so great a multitude, in their extremity of anguish! And how do our own guilty consciences, in the midst of this alarming contemplation, re-echo to the horrible concert! Here the guilty are tossed in a boundless ocean of misery, without the least patience to weather it, without the least prospect of shore, without the least hope of relief from time or repentance. Despair, eternal despair, of mercy and relief, will give this punishment, so sharp in itself, its keenest point, its most deadly sting. Were the wicked to be, only for a time, banished from God, confined in chains of darkness, and exposed to infamy; were he, for a time only, to be stung with the reproaches of guilt, to be tortured in fire and brimstone; or were he, for a limited time, to endure the frowns of infinite justice, and almighty anger; his misery would be rather purgative than penal, rather a reward than a punishment; for what proportion do any limited number of ages, spent in misery, bear to an eternity of happiness? Are they not infinitely less than a single moment to ten thousand years? Or, to take the matter in another light, can fire and brimstone reform? Or can a man learn virtue, and train his soul to the love of God, in hell? Or shall he, without reformation, be admitted to heaven? Shall he be made happy, while he is yet wicked? Or shall he be glorified, while he is still a scandal to the creation? As the inveterately 'wicked must be wicked still,' so he must be for ever miserable; 'for the day of the wicked shall come, when their iniquity shall have no end.' And can the punishment of the guilty have an end, while he still continues in his sins? Reason will not suffer us to speak in this manner; nor will the word of God. In that we are told, 'The worm

dieth not, neither is the fire quenched. The Tophet in this valley of Gehinnon is perpetually burning. The devil, and the false prophet, and whosoever are not found written in the book of life, are cast into the lake of fire, and tormented day and night for ever and ever.' The assurances given us in the Scripture of the eternity of hell-torments, are given us in the very same words that express the eternity of heavenly joys; to which, for a reason easily apprehended, we have no objections. If 'the righteous shall go into life eternal,' as certainly 'shall the wicked go away into everlasting punishment;' for the words eternal, and everlasting, are put for the same original Greek word in the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel.

But here the libertines, and even some pretended Christians, take upon them to say, God will, after a certain space of time, to which they seem not willing to give a very great extent, reduce to nothing the souls of the wicked. Who told them this? Surely not God; for, if he ever spoke to man, he averred the very contrary, in often repeated assurances, and in the most express and precise terms. No; it is reason, they say, that draws this conclusion, from the injustice of punishing temporary offences with eternal torments. Many things are fathered on reason, that reason knows nothing of, nor ever vouched for. Had nothing been ever revealed concerning this matter, reason could have given hardly any verdict either way; nay, I am afraid, we should have had but very slender informations, in any respect about futurity, from mere reason. Now, if in this great affair we are forced to have recourse to revelation, we must take things as we find them there, and not presume to make reason prompter to the Spirit of God.

But I would willingly ask these reasoners a few questions. If the souls of wicked men are, at a certain time, to be struck out of the list of beings, what example of God's just indignation at sin shall afterward remain? How shall God's free, but fallible creatures, be kept within the rules of their duty, when they see no instance of his severity on former transgressors? If men will neither be good nor happy, although they have it in their choice to be both, shall we arraign the justice of God, if, in spite of their rebellion and perverseness, he employs them to that only purpose in

his creation, which their inveterate wickedness qualifies them for; namely, a most wholesome, a most necessary, example of his just severity? Are they not still his creatures? Hath he not a right to dispose of them to his own glory, and the benefit of better creatures? Is their wickedness to disappoint him at once of all his views in creating them, by putting him under a necessity of expunging from his works a multitude of spirits, of whose very wickedness and punishment he may, for aught we know, and without our leave, make a thousand excellent uses? Let me ask a still closer question of these men. Do your consciences upbraid you for past sins? Or do your hearts plead for licence in sinning? In either case, perhaps, you may mistake a fond wish for a reason. Examine yourselves with a little more sharpness and impartiality, by this sure rule, whether you do not more readily give into the criminal amusements, or more freely pursue, by unjust means, the wealth or honours of the world, than formerly, when you regarded the future torments of the damned as eternal.

But you may try yourselves by some other points of inquiry relating to the same important subject. Do you not disbelieve, or at least, are you not much tempted to question, the locality of future punishments? Do you not doubt, whether there is in the creation any such place as hell? And, while you are inclined to think there may be no particular place for such punishments, can you forbear thinking they are nowhere? And, since such punishments are nowhere, how can you help concluding, especially when temptations smile on you with more than usual allurements, that there are no such punishments at all? Perhaps, amidst all this jumble of thoughts, Christianity may still have retained some remnant of your esteem, and you do actually yet believe there will be a resurrection. If this is the case, how can you doubt, whether the wicked, consisting again of bodies as well as souls, shall find themselves in some certain place? Or do you think, that, instead of being confined, as such malefactors should be, to some particular place of punishment, they will have leave to range the creation in quest of new game for their lawless passions? You prize what you call liberty above all things, and therefore, perhaps, cannot believe they will be wholly deprived of it.

Do you not observe, how, here again, you take party with the damned? Or are you so ignorant of yourself, as not to know from whence this proceeds? Let me, a second time, beseech you to search your heart with the utmost severity, and, if you find any thing common to them and yourself, which whispers these infidel surmises in your ear, to consider it as the snare of Satan, and the betrayer of your soul.

This very subject may furnish you with another useful topic of self-examination. One of your turn may have taken it into his head to believe, that all the expressions in Scripture relating to the torments of the damned are purely figurative, particularly, that 'the fire which is not quenched,' is as merely allegorical, as 'the worm that dieth not,' is supposed to be, in common construction, as understood of conscience. Yet the worm here may signify the wicked man, body as well as soul, writhing in the fire, as you may have seen a worm on a piece of fuel thoroughly kindled. But although some of these expressions are figurative, does it follow that they are all so? Or do you object, that whereas they are mostly corporal punishments, the soul cannot be literally said to suffer them? No! does not the soul suffer corporal pains and punishments in this life? Does the body ever suffer any pain? Is it not the soul only that suffers such pains through the body? And have you so soon forgot, that the wicked are to have bodies, as well as souls, to be judged and punished in?

But should it be granted, that the punishments of the wicked will be purely spiritual, what will you gain by that? Shall they not be as great, as grievous, as they are represented in Scripture? May not truth be uttered in a figure? And does not the truth of an allegory consist in the close and apt similitude between the thing represented, and the thing representing? Here again, examine carefully, whether your disbelief of the literal reality of those fires, wherewith the wicked are threatened in the word of God, doth not proceed rather from the horror of your own mind, than from the reason of the thing; at least, whether a good share of your argument is not drawn from the horrible notion you have of punishment by fire, and from some degree of guilt, or love of sin, which forces you to wish the torments of the wicked were to be a little milder; and in time, turns this

weak wish, without your perceiving it, into a reason. But, to come a little closer to you, do you not sometimes wish there were no punishments for sin at all? Perhaps, either when temptation seizes you with a pleasing violence, before the committal of a crime, or when remorse terrifies you immediately after, you would be glad to hear, that all shall be freely forgiven, without the agonies of repentance, and the struggles of reformation. If you should ever find this to be the case, ought you not sensibly and honestly to suspect at least, that your argument against the supposition of material fire, in the future punishment, proceeds from a tenderness to yourself, that biasses and blinds your judgment? I know of nothing you can object to the faith of the fathers, such as Cyprian, Chrysostom, Augustine, Jerom, founded on the literal interpretation of the expressions under question, but that the human body can by no means resist the vehemence of such fires; and that such tortures are too shocking to be believed. But do you imagine our immortal bodies are to be as frail and perishable as these, which the worms are to devour? Cannot he that created gold, which no force of fire can destroy, create a living body of as firm a texture? And, as to the other part of your objection, that a torture by literal fire is too shocking to be believed; consider what was just now hinted, that it will be every whit as shocking, to believe in an equal degree of purely spiritual torment. But as to such spiritual punishments as may be hereafter inflicted on the wicked, you have no very clear or sensible notions of them; and therefore you are the more willing to admit them; whereas, were you as well acquainted with them as with the effects of fire, and did you find them, on some partial trials, to be as severe, you would, you must, for the same reason, be as ready to object to them. So then it is, after all, only the severity you boggle at. Now it neither depends on you nor me, but on our Judge, to determine what is enough, or too much, in this respect. But it is extremely worth your while severely to examine, whether the guilt of former transgressions, or a weak indulgence for some lurking irregularity of mind, may not have been the parent of this objection also.

Give me leave to probe another chamber of this ulcer. You believe there will be as many degrees of punishment

as there are of guilt. So do I. But you ought to be well aware, that you do not make a dangerous use of this belief; for if you should imagine, that some degrees of punishment will be so very gentle, as hardly to deserve the name, and should afterward, through a partiality and tenderness too incident to human nature, take it into your head to think your own sins, at worst, within these degrees, when possibly the case may be far otherwise, you turn tempter to yourself, and give the enemy of souls leisure to point his batteries another way. You must be most grossly mistaken, if you do not believe, the punishment to be inflicted hereafter on the least criminal of the damned, is to be inconceivably severe. Hell is hell; and one hour in its coolest apartment is too much to pay for all the pleasures of this world. Besides, you should consider, that he who is cut off from God, and shut out of heaven, let his portion be what it will in the place of torment, must have reason to wish he had never, during his life, soothed himself with distinctions in eternal torments, but always fixed his fears on the very bottom of the furnace.

One little inquiry more, and I have done. Are you not infinitely disgusted, both at my subject itself, and at the little tenderness and delicacy wherewith I have handled it? Are we again, you will say, after all the politeness to which preaching hath been of late reduced, to have hell and damnation rung in our ears, and that in naked terms, without the smallest qualification? Are people of tender ears, and delicate minds, to be frightened out of their senses, before they can be put in the way to heaven? Is he good for any thing, who is good through fear?

Most certainly. He that is good, is good, be his motive what it will. Was fear given you by your Maker for no purpose? Be your delicacy ever so great, you must be dealt with according to the nature God hath given you. But why are you so startled at the sound of hell and damnation? If you are innocent, they stop at your ears; and if you are guilty, surely I am your best friend, if I drive them home to your heart. Your resentment is a full proof, that my medicine, though bitter, hath been well applied; and that you are one of those patients, that prefer their palate to their life. If you ever recover your reason so far as to know that

eternity is longer than this life, you will thank me for not speaking so as to please, but to rouse you.

For what purpose, think you, did God scatter so many threatenings, so many dreadful expressions of terror, throughout his gospel? Was it, that they should never be seen or heard by his people? If infinite wisdom did right in publishing them there, his ministers cannot do wrong in repeating them to his people from the pulpit. On the contrary, they must be guilty of the basest infidelity, if, through a mistaken tenderness, either for themselves, or others, they spare to give loud and frequent warning of them. What spirit of pride and delusion hath seized the church of Christ, that the awful sanctions of God's law must either not be mentioned in his own house, and to his own people, or so minced and qualified, as to do any thing rather than alarm the stupid and the wicked, the very thing for which God hath declared them to the world? Are we all to be judged before the throne of God, and, if found guilty, punished with infinite severity? And must we not be told it? 'Hear ye,' says Jeremiah, 'and give ear; for the Lord hath spoken.' Shall we not listen when he speaks? 'Behold,' he says, 'I will execute judgment. Vengeance is mine, and I will repay. Depart from me, ye accursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. Tophet is ordained of old; it is deep and large; the pile thereof is fire and much wood; and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.' How shall such words as these be heard without fear and trembling, even by the best of men? But with how much greater terror should you hear them, whose guilty conscience tells you, 'You are the man,' to whom these words, more terrible than all Sinai's thunders, are uttered? And yet 'you are the man' who ought to listen to them with a more greedy attention than to the music of angels; who ought, if you could, so deeply to stamp them on your unregenerate heart, as that all your thoughts might be engrossed, and all your passions awed, by these terrible, but only means of reformation in a soul stupified by a long course of sin.

Have you any doubts about the reality and severity of these punishments, as set forth to you in so many passages of Scripture? If you have, consider to what a careless and

dangerous course of life such doubts may tempt you, and how shocking a thing it is, to be under any uncertainties about a matter of such infinite concern. Even your doubts ought to make you extremely cautious and wary about your actions; for surely none but a madman would run any hazards in a thing of this nature, so very frightful and alarming. A wise man will not stake all his fortune, if it will afford him a tolerable subsistence, against a hundred times the sum; for if he loses, he is undone. Much less ought you to play heaven and hell, if you think it possible there may be such places, against all the pleasures of sin, were they ten thousand times greater than they are.

But if you have no doubts in this matter, if you firmly believe in the extreme severity and eternity of those torments wherewith sin is said to be punished in the next life, you must be infinitely worse than mad if you are wicked; for, 'What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give,' or what shall sin give him, 'in exchange for his soul?' Sin, indeed, may give you some sudden and violent transports of pleasure; but can you give a loose to them without considering in what they end? How dare you, as bishop Hall says, dance for a moment on the mouth of hell, with the peril of an everlasting burning? If it shocks you to see a man burning alive at a stake, how would it wring your heart to see him in this horrible torture for an entire day,—for a month,—for a year,—for an age,—for a whole eternity? Are you so deeply affected with the torment of another? Consider then, how you could endure the same yourself. When you are tempted with the sweets of sin, turn your thoughts to a deep reflection on the bitterness of its end; eternal banishment from God; imprisonment under chains of darkness, under guilt, under shame, under the wrath of God; in the midst of fire, of devils, of horror, of anguish, of despair, of blasphemy; without intermission, without hope of mercy, without ease or end.

Are you shocked? Be shocked at sin, not at my words; for they are 'the words of soberness and truth;' nay, the words of tenderness and charity for you; words, which, I bless God for it, the holy Scriptures, and my conscience, ring aloud in mine own ears, as often as the tempting plea-

sures of sin would smile, and sooth me to destruction. I deal by you, as I do by myself, as God hath dealt by us all; and surely this is faithful dealing.

But remember, dearly beloved in the Lord, 'I have blown the trumpet;' I have endeavoured to rouse you from sleep: I have given you warning of your enemy, and your danger; and, in so doing, have laboured to acquit myself, as well as to save you from sin here, and damnation hereafter. It is now your business to give all your thoughts, and all your fears, to what I have said, that the labour of this day 'may not be vain in the Lord.'

Let us now earnestly beseech the good God to fill our souls with a timely fear of his final judgment, and with such an apprehension of those dreadful torments, to which the wicked at that great event shall be condemned, as may rouse us from the dangerous sleep of sin, to a new and holy life, through Christ Jesus our blessed Redeemer; to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now, and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXV.

OF LOVE TOWARDS GOD.

LUKE X. 27.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.

WHOSOEVER is not convinced there is a God, must be an idiot, or a madman. Whosoever believes there is a God, and yet loves him not, must be as destitute of gratitude and goodness, as the Atheist is of understanding. If the proofs of his being are too many, and too strong, to leave the mind of one who can think in any uncertainty about it; the demonstrations of his goodness are too great, and too affecting, to suffer any coolness towards him in his heart, who

believes any otherwise than as the devils are said to do. The faith of devils, because they are without hope, fills them with fear and trembling, and, in all probability, with envy and malice against God. But the faith of a man, whose virtue or reformation gives countenance to his hopes, if it is at all attended with reflection, must inspire him with gratitude and love.

So great is the natural inducement to this love, that it may seem to a good mind almost unnecessary to remind us of it by a command. But whereas there are numbers, who, by want of reflection, or generosity of nature, might become careless of improving in themselves so necessary, and so noble, a turn of mind; and whereas, of those who can and do think, there are not a few who might imagine the love of God not necessary in themselves, because not needed by a being infinitely perfect and happy; to leave it not in the power of ingratitude to hide itself either in want of thought, or in the base pretence of a compliment to the Divine perfection, we are, by an express commandment of God himself, ordered to 'love him' with all the warmth and affection of 'our hearts,' with all the faculties and powers of 'our souls,' with all the sense and vigour of 'our minds.' And 'this is the first and greatest commandment,' on which depends the second, 'which is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;' on both, but primarily and chiefly on the first, 'hang all the law and the prophets,' all our duty and happiness. On faith, the foundation of our religion, is erected the beautiful structure of hope; but it is charity, or the love of God, that raises this building to heaven, that puts the finishing hand, and gives perfection, to the religion of a Christian; and therefore it is said by St. Paul to be 'greater than faith and hope.'

Now this commandment, in bidding us 'love God with all our hearts,' &c. does by no means absolutely prohibit the love of every thing else; because, if it did this, it would almost wholly defeat itself; as we shall presently perceive, when we come to shew how God woos our love towards him by the enjoyment of the good things he hath bestowed on us; which nevertheless could be no enjoyment, did we not in some degree love and desire them. Besides, he who hath commanded us to love him with 'all our hearts,' hath also

commanded us by Scripture, and moved us by nature, to love many other things, as our children, our parents, our wives, our benefactors. But these we are to love in a degree limited by the end for which we are to love them, and the useful purposes intended by the relation they are made to stand in to us. This, however, by no means hinders us from loving God in a much higher degree, even with all the ardour and affection that can possibly warm our hearts.

But how, will some libertines say, can we suppose God should command us to love him? Are not his benefits sufficient to win us to this, without his commands? Is God like one of those selfish benefactors among men, who claim returns? No; but if any benefactor hath a right to the gratitude of such as he confers his favours on, it must be God, who gives of his own; whereas all other benefactors only borrow the power to oblige from him. God, having an unquestionable right to our love, may surely be allowed to claim it, if he pleases, were it for no other reason, but because the service we owe him would be wholly unworthy of his acceptance, did it not proceed from love. Besides, it ought to be observed, that this command is a reproach to the tardiness of our gratitude. God need never, I own, have told us what returns he expects from us for his infinite goodness, had we not been too stupid and insensible to render him those returns undemanded.

The truth, however, is, that he requires our love of him, not for his own sake, but for our good, our greatest good; for, of all things, the love of God conduces the most directly to raise and dignify the nature of man; and, of consequence, conduces also most powerfully to make him happy. It ought therefore to be the first endeavour, the most earnest aim, of every man, to excite in himself, by all the ways and means pointed out by reason, and authorized by religion, a high and ardent love of God.

That the love of God is the most powerful instrument to refine and dignify our nature, and make us happy, will, I hope, be easily proved to a congregation of Christians.

Our minds naturally receive a strong turn and tincture from that which hath, for a long time, agreeably entertained them. Habit often renders things extremely pleasing, which at first were very harsh and distasteful. But, when any ob-

ject is qualified, not only by its own nature, but also by a habit long indulged, to give us strong and high sensations of pleasure, then it is that it begins to engross all our thoughts, to excite a vehement desire, and through that so to work itself into our nature, that, from thenceforward, we insensibly assimilate ourselves to it. We naturally grow into a resemblance of what we love, if it is a thing that admits of imitation. Such is the ductility of the heart, that nature herself gives place to impressions this way acquired; insomuch that most men, through the influence of this operative affection, generally assume distinctions, both in the eye of God and man, very different from those they set out with.

Now, as God is of all objects the most amiable and excellent, of all beings infinitely the most gracious and beneficent, he is by nature entitled, at least, to the first and highest place in the heart of man, if not to the whole. If in virtue of this title from the superior excellence of his nature, and the resemblance between that and the nature of man, God hath been early and long possessed of the throne in any heart, we may be assured, it is now a heart after God's own heart; and that he whose life or conversation takes its warmth and motion from it, is a godlike man. A soul deeply penetrated with the admiration of infinite excellence, continually inflamed with the contemplation of infinite beauty, and long transported with a grateful sense, with an ardent and vehement love, of infinite goodness, must have copied into itself a lasting and happy resemblance of God. An object, so habitually admired and loved, cannot fail to strike its image irresistibly on the heart.

As there is nothing so delightful to him who loves, as the return of love from an object absolutely possessed of all his affections, so there is nothing he pants after, and woos, with such an ardour of heart. While he hath this animating end in view, no labours seem fatiguing, no pains tormenting, no dangers shocking, if, by resolutely encountering with them, he hopes to render himself, and his services, acceptable to the being he thus ardently loves.

Now, he who loves God, knows that the blessed object of all his desires is not like a man, who, being ignorant of our hearts, may suspect the sincerity of our professions,

nay, even the purity and disinterestedness of our services; not like a man, who, being proud or ungrateful, may happen not to set the proper value on our love. No; he is sensible God searches and sees through the heart. He is sure the best of things cannot but love those that love him. He remembers the words of Christ, 'He that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him.' He remembers the words of the Psalmist, 'God preserveth all those that love him;' and of the Apostle, 'All things work together for good to those that love God.'

In full assurance that his love will be abundantly returned, he makes it the ruling study and endeavour of his whole life, to give such proofs of his love towards God, as he believes God will be best pleased with, and to render himself, to the uttermost of his power, a fit object of the divine love. To this end he labours to suppress and extinguish in himself every inordinate passion, every impure and corrupt desire; and, for so good a purpose, spares no necessary act of mortification; and therefore consults not with flesh and blood, but with God himself, through his word, as well about the dispositions that are offensive to him, as about the severities requisite to subdue them.

Having made some progress in this, he takes courage, with the hope of pleasing God on yet a nobler plan, namely, that of introducing into his mind, thus cleansed and emptied, a copy drawn from the divine original, of those imitable attributes, which he adores in God, and which he knows God is pleased to see us cultivate in ourselves. God, looking down with the tenderness of a most indulgent father on the well-meant endeavours of a beloved child, willing to do his best, but weak and unequal to so great a design, sends his Holy Spirit to perfect what his poor creature and servant is unable, through the infirmities of flesh and blood, to accomplish.

Thus assisted by his Maker, the lover of God is, as it were, created anew. A plentiful stream of wisdom, justice, mercy, holiness, flows from the divine fountain into his soul, and refreshes it with the water of life. From this time forth he is highly acceptable in the sight of God, who will never forsake or forget him. 'Can a woman forget her

sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget; yet will not God forget' this soul that loves him, and is now so like him, that, as far as the influence of his ability and station extend, he is in the stead of God to other men, enlightening the ignorant, guiding the blind, relieving the distressed, and, in a word, doing the work of God with a zeal and love resembling that of his 'ministering spirits, who are sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.'

The love of God, having led a man by such steps to so high a pitch of improvement, neither leaves him there, nor suffers his excellent gifts to be buried in mere speculative contemplations on the goodness and perfection of God; but rouses him to an active service of the blessed Being he loves. He knows that keeping God's commandments is the very precise thing by which his love is to be judged of, and his virtue tried; and, of consequence, that it is the great foundation (for so much as rests in his power) on which his hope of enjoying God to all eternity must be built. Christ says, 'If you love me, keep my commandments.' He who says he loves Christ, and yet keeps not his commandments, does but insult him with empty professions. On the other hand, it is impossible to keep the commandments as Christians ought to do, without making the love of God the principle of our obedience. It is the peculiar excellence of Christianity, by which it raises its beautiful head above all other religions, that those who enter rightly into its true genius and spirit, obey the Divine Being, not through superstitious fears, as the heathen, nor through a low hope of worldly blessings, as the Jews do, but through a noble principle of gratitude and love towards God. St. John tells us, 'God is love;' and common sense must tell us, that we are to serve him, not according to our nature, which is sinful, but according to his, which is holy, and pure, and good; for the purity of his service, and of our true happiness, requires that we should renounce our own corrupt nature, and be conformed to his; it being infinitely more reasonable, that man should aspire towards God, than that God should descend towards man, in order to the happy intercourse of mutual love.

As, on the one hand, the lover of God cannot but love

virtue, because it is the will and pleasure of God that we should be truly virtuous, which is impossible without a cordial love for virtue; so, on the other, he cannot but hate vice, because he knows it is hateful to God; nay, he must, in proportion to his love of God, hate every thing that tempts him to sin; for whatsoever does so, is the enemy of God; and surely the friend of God, who 'loves him with all his heart,' &c. must, according to the rule of opposites, hate his enemies with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his strength, and with all his mind.

It is worth observing here, that, although the fear of God is a most useful instrument of reformation in a mind not yet raised to a higher principle of obedience, it is nevertheless reasonable to suppose, God is much better pleased with a less perfect service, proceeding from the love of him, and our duty, than with a very punctual observance of his commandments, that takes its rise from fear only. We are told by the apostle, that love casteth out fear. However, it is happy for us that fear continues to awe us, till love is strong enough to sweeten our duty to us. But, when love is perfect, there is no farther occasion for fear; the operation of a lower motive being superseded by the presence and power of another, infinitely more worthy of a reasonable creature, and more acceptable to God.

Thus it is that the love of God inspires the soul with a love of virtue, and an hatred to vice; and, by a pleasing power, alike delightful both to God and the heart that feels it, prompts us to the performance of our duty. Hence arises a most comfortable assurance of God's favour through Christ, which imparts a happiness to the mind, not liable to be greatly impaired, much less to be entirely taken from it, by sicknesses, disasters, or death itself.

But, what is infinitely more than all this, the love of God is the very means and foundation of eternal happiness, not only as the principle of piety and goodness here, but as the soul's internal qualification for, and spring of, all enjoyment hereafter. It is not to be believed, that God will admit such into heaven as do not love him; nor that, if they were there, they could be happy; because it is the favour of God, rather than his presence, or the created glories of his court, that constitute heaven, and everlasting

happiness. God himself is the happiness of heaven, and of all its hosts. Where God manifests himself in his glory, the highest lustre of all created thrones, and principalities, and powers, is totally eclipsed, and entirely swallowed up, in the immensity of that brightness which breaks from the Infinite Being, as the stars are, when the sun shineth upon us in his strength.

To those who are blessed with this glorious vision of God, so ravishing is his beauty, so commanding his majesty, so infinitely sweet the smiles of his favour, that it is impossible, even for a moment, to turn their eyes from him, to all the pomp of heaven. The whole host of glorified spirits, transported out of themselves with infinite love, centre all their attention in him, and drink unutterable happiness from 'the river of his pleasures.' But still it must be remembered, that they enjoy him only in proportion to their love. Without love there is no enjoyment, neither here on earth, nor there in heaven.

Having thus seen that the love of God is the most powerful instrument to refine and dignify our nature, and the only spring of our eternal happiness, it follows, that, of all our endeavours, this of possessing our hearts with a high and ardent love of God, ought to be the first, the most vehement, and the most constant.

Here the important question may be put, By what means shall we excite in our dead and fleshly hearts a sufficient love of God, who 'hides himself' from us 'in his secret places, in the dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies?' The answer is easy. Thus indeed it is that he comes in 'storm, and tempest, and thunder,' to execute judgment on the oppressors of those he loves, as we find it in the eighteenth Psalm. Far otherwise does he shew himself to such as love him. To them he is a Father, a Saviour, and a Comforter. To them he every day manifests himself by ten thousand instances of his wisdom and goodness. If we would love God, these gracious manifestations are continually and closely to be attended to. We should consider, that God created us out of nothing, and fitted our souls for immortality, and for great and endless enjoyments. As to the enjoyments of this life, though they are not endless, they are, or may be, too considerable to be overlooked by

a grateful heart. The provision made for them in the innumerable comforts, conveniences, and beauties, even of this world, is an effect of infinite bounty and goodness. Were I, on this occasion, to remind you of them, by what arithmetic should I sum up their number? Or, by what skill in measure, calculate their greatness? He hath created the whole globe of the earth to furnish you with food, raiment, and other necessaries. He hath given you the spoils of the ox and sheep to keep you warm, and of the silkworm to make you gay. His bounty, you see, stops not at mere necessaries. He hath laid up for you, in the bowels of the earth, materials for erecting stately houses. He hath diversified the year into seasons, that each may refresh your taste with a set of new delicacies, after it is tired with the fish, fowl, fruits, and other nourishing vegetables, of the former. Nay, he hath even condescended to regale your sense of smelling with an endless variety of odours, one exceeding another in delicacy and sweetness. That your ear may be also entertained, whilst you feast on his bounties, he salutes it with the sweet music of the grove. When you walk out in a summer's evening to see how God blesses your industry, open your senses to the innocent music from every tree, to the delicious smells that breathe from every hedge and meadow. Cast your eyes over the face of nature. See how it smiles upon you, and decks itself out in a hundred beautiful colours to please you. If you have innocence and sense to taste these sweets, lay your hand on your heart, and ask it, whether it can trace and adore the bountiful Being that spreads forth such a lovely scene of things for your entertainment? If all this does not sufficiently move you, lift up your eyes to the heavens. Behold what a noble arch your Maker hath erected over your head! See how it bends about you, and compliments you with the centre wherever you move! See the sun, that glorious source of light and warmth, who rejoiceth as a giant to run his course, and the moon, just rising to supply his place! Smite again on your heart, and say to it, Did the Infinite Being vouchsafe thus to furnish the heavens, did he condescend thus to adorn the earth, for my accommodation! How ought I to love him for his amazing goodness! Hallelujah.

It is the property of a beast only to enjoy the creature; but of a man to enjoy the Creator and Giver through all his gifts. We deservedly esteem him a brutish man, who being entertained by his patron with all sorts of delicacies, finds no pleasure but in the taste of what he swallows. The grateful and sensible guest enjoys a much higher pleasure in the kind smiles, and affectionate expressions, with which his great entertainer helps him. What a wretched figure must he make in the creation, who manifests in the eye of God, considered as his benefactor, no other property but this of a brute!

Let no man say, in the blindness of his heart, when he abounds, I neither see God, nor perceive that he gives me the good things I enjoy; but I find they proceed from second causes, such as my own wisdom and strength. Base and vain presumption! Do not second causes imply a first? Who gave thee understanding? and to say nothing of God's grace, who gave thee a mind naturally turned to frugality and industry? Who gave thee health and strength? Are not others as frugal, as skilful, as industrious, often, by accidents both at land and sea, which no human wisdom or care could prevent, reduced to the last extremity? Adore not, ungrateful man, your own wisdom, or strength, or fortune; but the Giver. Neither sacrifice to your plough, nor to the hand that guides it, nor to the earth that bears, nor to the sun that ripens your fruits, for these are but second causes; but to him who made them all. If you are not blind, lame, bed-ridden, or begging your bread, be thankful to God. If you are in wealth or honour, learn to love him; 'and beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, lest when thou hast eaten, and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein, thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, and say in thine heart, My power, and the might of mine hand, hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God; for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth.'

If, in our enjoyment of God's creatures, we forget our great Benefactor (such is the curse entailed on ingratitude), we lose almost the whole benefit of what is given us; or what is worse, make it the means of our own ruin. From the beauty and conveniency of the world, and our own por-

tion therein, we should learn to love its Maker, who had our accommodation in view when he contrived it. Thus should the world, our enemy by the corruption of human nature, become what it was at first, our friend, our monitor, and an inspirer of love and gratitude. How different a thing is the world to a good and a bad man! A bad man cannot look abroad into it, but he meets with continual snares and provocatives to vice. A good man cannot converse with the world, nor take a walk, either through city or country, but he meets a thousand things to prompt him to love and gratitude towards God. Thus the good and bad man, out of one and the same world, make to themselves two opposite worlds. Like the bee and the wasp, they extract medicine and poison from the same flower. The unthinking and the low-minded wretch tastes only his food, hears only the sound of music, sees only the proportions and colours of things. But the sensible and religious soul tastes God in his food, hears him in the sweets of music, sees him in the beauties of nature, and enjoys him in every innocent delight; for he knows God made 'and upholds all things by the word of his power.' He always considers, that God gives him his capacity to relish and enjoy, and gives every thing he enjoys the power to please. Hence it is, that he never stops short in the enjoyment of the creature, but is carried up from thence, by his grateful heart, to a more exalted knowledge, and to a more divine enjoyment, of his gracious Benefactor. God engages his love by continual benefits, and he woos the favour of God by the gratitude that accompanies, and, at the same time, brightens every enjoyment. Blessed intercourse! that ensures the favour of God, and does so much honour to human nature. How different a man is this from him, who, although the bounty of God is visible in his health and worldly possessions, yet is 'so proud, that he careth not for God, neither is God in all his thoughts!'

Is it not a very unhappy thing, that the minds of most men, being swelled with pride, being continually solicited, and shamefully softened, by fleshly delights, are apt to rest in them, and lose sight of Him whose bounty they abuse? From this criminal lethargy they seldom or never awake, till Providence withdraws its favours by poverty, or the en-

joyment of them by sickness. These men, having then nothing else to come between God and them, begin sometimes to consider upon what tenure they hold their riches, and to remember who it was that gave them. They bask in the sunshine of health and prosperity; but can never see from whence it comes, till it is either setting, or almost obscured behind a cloud.

Great and wonderful although the goodness of God hath been to us as men, and in relation to this present world; yet it is as nothing, if compared to that which he hath demonstrated to us as Christians, in order to our happiness in a better life. Herein it is, that his compassion rises to an immeasurable height, and becomes too great for our conception. His goodness, shewn to us in the things of this world, was more an act of his bounty, than his mercy; can by no means make us happy even here; and relates entirely to a state of things, which, although it were ever so pleasant, can last but a few years at the most. But what he hath done for us as Christians, being a pure effect of his mercy to a guilty race of creatures, and having for its end our deliverance from the eternal disgrace and misery of devils, and our introduction to the everlasting glory and happiness of angels; and for its means, not only a miraculous violation of that nature he had imprinted on the world, but even his own incarnation and sufferings; is to be esteemed as an infinitely greater and higher demonstration of his goodness, than can be found in the being he hath given us, and the world he hath created for us. Had he left us in the state of ignorance and sin, into which, by an abuse of our freedom, we had plunged ourselves; had his just displeasure determined him to lay on us the reward of our ingratitude and perverseness; our very being, instead of a blessing, had become a curse to us, and the life we are placed in, notwithstanding all the worldly conveniences provided for us in the present state of things, a short passage to endless shame and misery.

If the business of our instruction by revelation be considered, we shall find in it the marks of infinite patience and mercy.

When God undertook to be our teacher, we had departed from his service to that of idols and devils; we had stained

our nature with the most detestable pollutions; we had given up ourselves entirely to injustice and violence; and to complete our odious character, we were at once ignorant almost of every thing that was good, and yet highly vain of our knowledge. We were ignorant, but we needed no instructor. We were wicked, but we needed no reformer. We were guilty, we were miserable, but we needed no redeemer. If a man had servants thus disposed, he would never once think of reclaiming them. No; he would with indignation strip them, and, having abandoned them for ever, leave it to their own abominable minds to punish them. But God, whose mercy is equal to his majesty and power, thought fit to deal otherwise with us. He gave us prophets and apostles to teach us the knowledge of himself and virtue; and, knowing that we should never become disciples to such strange instructions, if nothing more than our boasted reason was employed for that purpose, he empowered his messengers to work miracles for our conviction; that is, he vouchsafed to depart from that otherwise invariable course of nature, which it became his infinite majesty to preserve. The stated rules of nature, and the regular course of things, having been found insufficient teachers for scholars so stupid, he made use of an inverted nature to instruct us, that the evident signs of his power, who made and controls nature, might authorize the message he sent us.

If the great work of our redemption be ever so little considered by a true Christian, it will stretch his imagination with wonder, and melt his heart with love. A God incarnate! buffeted! spit on! ridiculed! healing! blessing! saving! dying! And for whom? O inconceivable goodness! O infinite mercy! for the sons of men! for those who call the earth their mother, and the worm their sister! for a race of mortals, foul with sin, and hardened in guilt! for those who persecute him! for those who spit on him, buffet him, ridicule him, murder him! For them! What does he propose to himself in thus suffering for them? To snatch them from a lake of fire and brimstone, into which they were falling headlong, and to purchase for them thrones and crowns in heaven. To enlarge by words of man's invention, on this amazing miracle of mercy, is to wrong it. It is our duty to entertain the thoughts of it in a tempest of grief and confu-

sion, and to adore the blessed sufferer in silent astonishment and love, too great and strong for words to utter.

After all our blessed Saviour hath done for us, if the Holy Spirit of God did not assist us, our ruin must be inevitable. The articles of the covenant, made by Christ between his Father and us, must be kept on our part; we must be thoroughly reformed, or we cannot be saved. Now we cannot, 'of ourselves, help ourselves.' We are not able to change our own nature from sinful to holy. It is the Spirit of God only that can do this; and this, of his infinite mercy, he does, by effectual faith, and saving grace, whenever it is done. Hence arises a new and great obligation to love, with which every one must find his heart strongly warmed, who is at all sensible of his own infirmities. How should we love a friend, who would attend us through all the difficulties of life, with infinite affection and goodness guiding us, as it were by the hand, in the midst of total blindness, through a road full of pits and precipices, and beset with powerful enemies, whom, at every turn, he is obliged to fight with in our defence! giving us wise counsel to prevent the miserable effects of our own folly! restraining us, when we are rushing into vice and wickedness! guiding us out of the way of dangers we cannot see! keeping troubles and afflictions at a distance from us! or when, through our own blindness and obstinacy, we plunge into the midst of them, of his own strength, comforting and sustaining us under them! bearing patiently with our endless and stupid insensibility of his goodness! notwithstanding his infinite purity, still vouchsafing his company to us, in order that he may reclaim us, although we are fit company only for brutes, and often doing all we can to qualify ourselves for the company of devils! With the watchfulness, and concern, and tenderness, of an indulgent father, using a thousand endeavours to retrieve us from sin, to save us from eternal misery, and to conduct us to eternal glory! All this, and infinitely more than we can express or conceive, the Spirit of God himself vouchsafes to do for us unworthy creatures. Here is love, here is friendship, in perfection. 'O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doth for the children of men!' But his bounty to us, as men, is not more stupidly overlooked by the most igno-

rant Pagans, than his mercy to us, as Christians, is ungratefully neglected and forgotten by those on whom it shines continually, from his word and ordinances, with all the charms of infinite tenderness and pity.

Our shameful unworthiness, our more than brutal insensibility, afford almost as large a field for reflection, as God's goodness. I shall not wander into a detail of the reproachful particulars; but only observe, that we shall never know to what an height our love of God should be carried, till we humble ourselves with a just comparison between his goodness and our ingratitude.

To draw towards a conclusion, what is it that God expects in return for all his goodness? 'If we have the love of God, it will keep us unspotted from the world;' and then God shall 'dwell in us, and we in him.' From hence shall spring a sweet enjoyment of peace, and mutual love, to all eternity. On God's part every thing will be done to strengthen this blessed union. And, as to ours, we must be extremely careful that nothing presume to rival him in our affections; we must abhor what he hates; 'we that love the Lord must see that we hate the thing that is evil.' On the other side, we must love that which he loves; and, like him, be watchful on all occasions to do good, and to shew mercy. We must receive his corrections with humility, and an unreserved resignation. Nay, we must not content ourselves with resignation only; we must be thankful for the severest of his dispensations, knowing, and calmly considering, that they are really so many marks of his fatherly affection for us. According to the known rules of friendship, no doubts, nor murmurs, nor sullenness, nor misconstructions, must be suffered so much as once to take possession of our minds. If they do, they will cool, and may soon extinguish, our affection for him.

But that our love for God may not only be kept alive, but advanced to higher, and still higher, degrees of warmth, it should be our business to reflect continually on the goodness and mercy of God; in order to which, if we are not stupidly inattentive, we can never want a remembrancer, since every hour of our lives will bring us fresh instances of his tenderness, sufficient to remind a grateful heart of all his former goodness.

Next to this, no other expedient can be thought of, so useful to keep up the warmth of a lively love towards God, as the continual exercise of devotion, as well private as public. By this the intercourse between God and our hearts will be always kept open, and his mercies, of all kinds, feelingly recollected; for thanksgiving makes a necessary part of prayer. But no other kind of devotion strikes so directly, or so powerfully, at this excellent end, as that most exalted act of thanksgiving, the receiving the sacrament of the Lord's supper. In that we commemorate the greatest of the divine mercies, with a due sense of which when the heart is warmed, it is then in a proper disposition to consider and adore the goodness of God in all his other dispensations.

O my brethren! brethren in want of gratitude and goodness! I am equally dissatisfied, on this occasion, with you and myself; with you for being able to hear, with your usual coolness, a discourse on the love of God; a subject sufficient of itself, although ever so defectively handled, to raise in every heart, not wholly destitute of religion, such strong emotions of shame for its own unworthiness, and of tenderness for God's inconceivable goodness, as no command over the eyes, the face or hands, could conceal. And I am indeed deeply dissatisfied with, and ashamed at, myself, for the miserable poverty of thought, and languor of expression, wherewith I have handled the most affecting of all subjects. I cannot help regarding this with the utmost grief, as an experimental proof of my being unwarmed with a sufficient measure of that glorious grace I have been recommending. Were not this really the case, Why was not every period on fire? Why was it not attended with ardour when it was spoken, and with transport when it was heard? Wretches that we are! We speak and listen here, in the presence of God, on the subject of all his mercies, with such a temper and indolence, as we never shew, even in regard to the trifling incidents of meat, drink, or dress. The tongues of angels, and songs of seraphims, are unable to express our obligations; and yet an infant, or an idiot, might utter all the sense of them we feel in our ungrateful hearts.

Since then, either through my weakness, or your insensibility, I do but speak to the air, I will here put an end to

the vain attempt, and leave it to the great Benefactor to do justice to his own infinite favours, by preaching to you on the inexhaustible subject, through his works, his word, and his grace. Let every fresh instance of his goodness, and your ingratitude, put you feelingly in mind of all that is past, that, comparing the one with the other, you may learn to love him, and detest yourselves.

And let us, in the mean time, earnestly beseech the ever merciful and gracious Being to crown all his other blessings with this, a grateful heart, and an eternal love of him, to whom we owe ourselves, and all we enjoy, or hope for, through Christ Jesus our Redeemer. Now, to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXVI.

ON THE FEAR OF GOD.

PROV. XIV. 26.

In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence.

BEFORE we can have a right notion of 'the fear of the Lord' here spoken of, we must know what fear itself is. Now this is a matter of more difficulty than is commonly imagined. It may seem a little surprising, that we should still be at a loss to understand the passions and affections of our own minds, which we feel every moment, through which we receive the greater part of our happiness and misery, which are the immediate motives and springs of all our actions. But man is in all other respects, as well as this, a mystery to himself. It proceeds from our not rightly understanding the passion of fear, that we are so much at a loss to settle the true distinction between courage and cowardice. He is commonly esteemed brave, who is void of fear; and he a coward, who is afraid of danger. Were this a true account of the matter, every man would be both a hero and a coward; a hero, because there is no man who is not fearless in

respect of some things; and a coward, because there is no man that is not frighted at some things.

Fear was made an ingredient in our nature for wise purposes; and therefore we must conclude it hath its proper object and end, in respect of which it is certainly wisdom, not cowardice, to be afraid. Cowardice then consists in nothing else than placing our fears on a wrong object, and fearing that which is neither dangerous nor dreadful, but in our own imaginations.

When the author of the apocryphal book of Wisdom says, 'Fear is a betraying of the succours which reason offereth,' he defines not the passion itself, but speaks of its excess, which we call a panic; for his account of it is as true of all the other passions, when wrong applied, or transported beyond the check of reason. There is not one of them that does not, in that case, for the time, put it out of a man's power to think deliberately, and judge soundly.

We shall, I believe, define fear more justly, if we call it that passion of the mind, whereby an uncertain evil, or somewhat that may hurt us, is apprehended. We are not afraid of evils or beings we have no notion of. Neither do we fear that evil, which we are sure will happen to us, no more than we do that which we actually suffer. The sense we have of such, is grief or sorrow. It is true, however, that this sensation is usually attended with fear; but then that fear never arises in our minds, excepting when we are uncertain as to the greatness of the evil, not yet thoroughly tried, or of our own strength and patience in bearing it. Fear is never found without some uncertainty; and therefore is always accompanied with hope, and always rated by the seeming probability, as well as greatness, of the evil.

If fear then is the child of ignorance, ought it not to be despised for the meanness of its birth? By no means, provided it helps us to avoid the mischiefs arising from the blindness of its parent; which indeed it does; and in so doing is our only substitute for wisdom. It teaches us to grope the way we do not see; or to sit still, till some prospect of safety in stirring is afforded. In this respect it is extremely useful to beings so short-sighted as we are, by furnishing caution, where prudence and deliberation, where experience, is wanting. It is plain, that he who, thus cir-

cumstanced, is restrained from action by his fears, is not a coward, because did he act, though ignorant of the issue, we should pronounce him rash and fool-hardy. What makes a blind man lift his feet higher, and take shorter steps, than other men? Is it not the same reason that obliges us to use the like caution in the dark? And are we not in the dark as to all events, which we cannot foresee? If necessity forces, or probability encourages us, to action, when the success is yet doubtful, is it bravery to be as quick and expeditious as in cases where we have a clear prospect before us? No; here our fears are the monitors of our reason; and teach us, if time will allow, to make little trials, and small approaches to the business in hand, that we may forbear altogether, if we find reason to dislike the business; or change our measures, if judged unpromising.

Such are often the difficulty and perplexity of our affairs, such the danger that may attend them, manage them as we will, and such the short-sightedness of our minds as to what ought to be done, that were we not thus assisted by our fears, we should generally buy wisdom by experience at too dear a rate; and before we could acquire the skill to act right, should frequently lose the power of acting at all. It is happy therefore that fear stays to restrain us, till wisdom comes to relieve it, and takes away that ignorance, which was the cause and justification of our fears.

Who then is the coward? It is he, who, judging amiss of things, and putting his imagination in the place of his reason, takes that for dangerous, or dreadful, which is really neither; and is scared from the pursuit of his duty, his interest, or his happiness, by that which hath no being, or that which could no way obstruct his pursuit, or even that which might assist him therein. We call him a coward, because we expected more resolution from him; and we expected more resolution, because we think he ought to have had more sense. But we certainly censure him unjustly, if we charge him with more fear than ignorance, or with more ignorance than his opportunities of knowledge put it in his power to avoid.

And who is the brave man? It is not he who is altogether fearless, for there is no such man; but he who knows what ought to be feared, and fears that alone; whose under-

standing is led by the real reasons of things, and followed by a heart steadily resolved to execute whatever his judgment shall recommend. This man knows those things to be safe and good, which others take to be dangerous or evil; that is, he knows them to be highly good in the end, although somewhat painful in the pursuit; and, having weighed the one against the other, while his judgment aims at the good, his heart despises and tramples on the pain.

How then? does courage resolve itself into wisdom, and cowardice into ignorance? They so far actually do, that if you totally take away his ignorance from the coward, he can no longer fear; and if you as totally strip the brave man of his wisdom, you reduce him to a madman, who encounters pain and trouble, which he feels, for a good, which he knows not either how to rate, or arrive at. Since both the hero and the coward have the passion of fear, how can you otherwise, than on the principles laid down, give them such opposite appellations? The truth is, that in this as well as other matters, we are too apt to assign wrong causes, and give improper names, to things. Can a genuine coward be a wise man? Or can a hero be a fool? No; but wisdom, says the world, is one thing, and courage another; and between ignorance and cowardice there is the same difference. A man often knows what is best for him to do; but fears to do it, on the account of the pain or danger that may attend it. But I should be glad to know, whether he ever declines the action, unless when the pain and danger are higher in his imagination, than the good he hopes for in the action. If they really are, and ought not to be, he is, in that respect, far from being a wise man; and it is still his ignorance that denominates him a coward. If wisdom and courage are not the same thing, it is certain, however, that wisdom is absolutely necessary to true courage, and cannot be separated from it even in thought. But the vulgar mistake in this matter proceeds from that share which the constitution and spirits are apprehended to have in our fears and resolutions. Now, granting this to be as great as you please; yet when high spirits prompt to resolution, is not that resolution rashness, if wisdom does not countenance it? And when low spirits forbid our attempts, is our backwardness to be called

cowardice, if right reason forbids as well as they? All that can be said on the subject may be summed up in this, that our passions prompt us to some actions, and deter us from others; but our obedience, in either case, is neither to be called virtue nor vice, till right reason approves or prohibits. Resolution therefore is not a virtue, is not courage, till reason vouches for it; nor is fear a vice, if avoidable ignorance is not at the bottom of it.

From this explanation of fear it follows, that nothing can concern us more than to know what we ought, and what we ought not, to fear; because none of our passions hath a greater share either in our conduct or happiness. Whatsoever motives we may have from other passions, or from our affections, for what we do, fear always interferes, and puts us sensibly in mind of the evils to be dreaded, in case we do it not. Here she seconds the other springs of action, although but indirectly; whereas, when she forbids us to act, or prevails on us to deliberate, she either takes the lead of all the rest, or directly opposes them. Hence it appears, that in all parts of our conduct this passion is deeply concerned; which ought to convince us, that an infinite deal depends on the right or wrong application of it.

It is true, that fear is that one of all our passions, which gives us pain alone. Anger hath its revenge, love its enjoyment, hope its probability; and even envy makes a feast on the miseries of others: but fear only bodes, forbids, alarms. Yet we can no more rid ourselves of it, than we can make ourselves over again, or bestow a new nature on our being. Nor ought we indeed to wish it, because infinitely greater evils must follow from the want of it. All we have to do, in order to make it highly instrumental to our happiness, in order to make us fear, without being cowards and fools, is, to look out for its proper object, and, if possible, for an object which alone ought to be feared, that our apprehensions may be no longer abused, or dissipated. Here the true religion comes in, and points out this object to us. But it is no sooner known to be God, than our libertine prepossessions are apt to object, that God, of all beings, is least to be feared; because he is infinitely good. Now, I say, that even as such, he is infinitely more to be feared by us than all other beings; and for this strong reason, because

we are not good. Can the Almighty Being be good, without being just? or just, without being feared by creatures so corrupt and frail? Does he not govern the world he made, and will he not judge that world in righteousness? Can sin be hid from such a Governor? Or can it escape unpunished from such a Judge? We, who are so prone by nature and habit to sin; we, who are assaulted by so many temptations from without, and betrayed by so great weakness from within, ought surely to fear him, who knows all things, and who can forget nothing; who is of so great power, that he 'doth what he will, both in heaven and earth;' who is of such inconceivable majesty, that 'the earth and the heaven fly away from before his face;' who 'makes justice and judgment the habitation of his seat;' who 'will render to every man according to his deeds, to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good.' Nay, even the mercy of God is a reason for our fears; for the Psalmist says, 'There is mercy with thee: therefore shalt thou be feared.'

What now was fear made for, if not for this object, in all respects so infinitely awful? too wise to be deceived! too just to be biassed! too mighty to be resisted! too great, too glorious, too majestic, to be thought of by angels without infinite reverence, or by men, guilty men, without terror and trembling!

In respect to all other objects of fear, we may observe, that the more we know them, the less we fear them. The first attempts, in thinking minds, are always attended with fear. The first speech before a great assembly, the first storm at sea, or the first battle, shake those minds which gather confidence, and contract a contempt for their former terrors, from a farther familiarity with such trials. This shews experimentally how ignorance and rawness are concerned in our fears. The fear of every thing, but God, waits on ignorance, and frightens us in the dark, like phantoms, that shun the approach of light. But in respect to God, it is quite otherwise; the more we know of his holiness, and

our own vileness, the more reason we find to fear him, inasmuch as we cannot possibly judge what resolutions he may have formed as to the eternal state of our souls. Some men complain of obscurity in his word; but without reason; for we may easily see therein, what are the terms on which pardon and mercy are offered. But we cannot so easily understand ourselves, or find out whether we are comprehended in those terms; whether we have that faith, that repentance, that charity, which are necessary to entitle us to the promises, and exempt us from the threatenings, that are annexed to our covenant. Hence must unavoidably arise such deep and keen apprehensions, as nothing but a total reformation of manners, that only sign of peace with God, can ever banish.

As reason should direct all the passions to their proper objects, so it should place our fear, in particular, on that Being, who only hath it in his power to make us happy or miserable. From him all our pleasures and pains, all our joys and sorrows, proceed; and therefore on him should we turn all our fears, disdaining to humble them to inferior causes, that can affect us no farther than they are permitted or directed by the first-moving Cause of all things, the absolute Disposer of all events. Here we should listen to the advice of our blessed Saviour, who thus accosts us by the name of friends; 'Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: fear him who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell. Yea, I say unto you, fear him.'

It is God then whom we should, not principally, but only, fear. It is gross ignorance, it is superstition, nay, it is a degree of Atheism, to fear any thing else; for whoever hath embraced the true religion, ought to know, that all things else are his instruments, not even excepting the wicked, who, although they act by a will contrary to his, are nevertheless overruled, and forced into his service, in their most rebellious actions; so that be the power they are for a time permitted to exercise what it will, God shall in the end be found to have been the master, and they the servants, though servants whose 'wages is death.'

The wisdom and happiness of fearing God will appear as evident as the fore-mentioned motives that excite it, if we

reflect on the admirable effects it hath on the mind. Give me leave to single out some of the most distinguished.

First, It gives us practical and saving wisdom. 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have they that do his commandments. A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil.' Nay, it is even called wisdom itself; 'The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.' If it is 'by fear and trembling that we are to work out our salvation,' then happy is he who fears God; happy he who trembles at the apprehensions of his displeasure, and is thereby roused to repentance, and newness of life, which shall bring 'peace at the last.' But still happier he, in whom fear comes before sin, and prevents the necessity of repentance. Such a man owes true wisdom to that which appears a weakness in other men, for no other reason but because their fears are sunk beneath the dignity of their nature, to things of little importance, of no power, or perhaps of such tendencies and dispositions, as ought to have made them desirable, instead of dreadful. He who fears God, fears to offend him: now, of all men, there is none wiser than he, who is 'void of offence towards God, to whom vengeance belongeth, and who will surely repay.'

Thoughtless libertines may call this fear slavish and cowardly, if they please; but since it preserves us in our duty, and guides us to happiness, we shall be bold to esteem it wisdom, rather than that sort of resolution, which laughs at hell, and is frightened at the stumbling of a horse; which insults God with blasphemous ribaldry and horrible wickedness, while it poorly trembles at a funeral in the next house. Little minds must have little fears, for want of sufficient sense and greatness of soul to aspire towards a nobler object of apprehension.

It is true, the love of God is a much nobler motive to act on, than the fear even of him. But this fear is the surest road to that love, and therefore is rightly called 'the beginning of wisdom.' Such is human infirmity, that repentance seldom begins in a mind accustomed to sin, on high and generous considerations, but rather on lower motives, suitable to that abject sense of things, which a course of wickedness never fails to leave behind it. Hence it is, that the fear of

God is, for the most part, necessary to begin the happy work with. No favours, no blessings, can win those, who have run on for a considerable time in a course of wickedness, 'to turn and behold the goodness of God.' They love and pursue other objects, more sensible and more present to their desires. But when God, to draw their attention to himself, presents his rod and displays his terrors, their fears immediately take the alarm. Their other passions are hushed and awed, and the whole force of attention listens to the chastising lesson, through the awakened dread of a still severer visitation. When, by this fatherly expedient, God hath put a stop to the career of sin, and is himself become the object of meditation; in proportion as repentance advances, he changes his looks, lays aside his rod, and presents himself to the heart, overwhelmed with fear, in a form so lovely, so expressive of pity, so full of mercy, as never fails to change the fear of the penitent into reverence, and melt his soul into love and shame, which puts the finishing hand to his reformation. There is nothing so apt to fill us with love, as forbearance and favour from one, who we know hath not only the power, but a right, to destroy us. But we seldom consider either this power or this right in God, till he makes us taste an earnest of it in some alarming correction. When this, however, is done, and hath, by the grace and blessing of him who laid it on us, roused us from sin, and new-set the heart to a course of piety and obedience, we have then little to fear from God, nothing indeed but what may proceed from the apprehensions of a relapse. Then God and our souls are become mutual objects of love. The gracious Being is all tenderness to a heart broken by repentance, and humbling himself before him. No friend, no father, can feel the bowels of compassion for us, that soften the heart of God to the true penitent. As the anger of God is now changed to pity, so ought the apprehensions of the truly reformed to be converted into hopes, his horrors into love, his doubts into trust, and his sorrows and tears into consolation and joy. 'As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is the mercy of God towards them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed their transgressions from them.'

Now, was that fear, which produced so happy a reforma-

tion, a low or slavish passion? Did it argue him a coward, who durst no longer contend with God, nor risk his soul on a trial between Almighty vengeance, and human impenitence? Was he a fool for being reformed? No; next to him who never greatly fell, this is of all men the wisest; and if he perseveres in his new course of virtue, in spite of all his spiritual enemies can do to beat him from it, we ought to pronounce him a man of true courage, a glorious conqueror of himself, though the fear of God should still continue to keep him on his guard. Such we have reason sufficient from the word of God to believe he will appear at that day, when the now stupidly triumphant libertine 'shall call on the hills to hide him, and the mountains to cover him, from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.' The fears of the penitent will then appear to have had infinitely more wisdom in them, than all the boasted reason, and conceited subtilties of the self-sufficient. Nay, these truly wise and virtuous fears will appear on that occasion to have had more of true courage in them, than the silly swagger of the infidel.

Having now seen, that the fear of God is the first, the most powerful motive to reformation, and the best preservative of vigilance, as long as there is any danger of a relapse; we shall easily perceive the meaning of my text, and be able to assign the reason, 'why in the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence.' That fear should beget confidence, seems, at first sight, to be against the nature of things; but when we consider, that it is the fear of God, the obscurity clears up, and shews the sentiment to be one of those deep or dark sayings, wherein consisted great part of that wisdom, for which the ancient eastern sages were so famous. The fear of God produces an awful attention to his commands, and keeps us steady to our duty; duty, although at first performed through fear, if persevered in, naturally ends in piety; piety cannot long possess the heart, without improving into love; and love is no sooner brought to maturity, than it 'casteth out fear,' that is, all uneasy boding fears, and begets confidence; confidence in whom? Why, in God; whose promises are truth itself, and whose power is boundless.

He who fears as he ought that infinite Being, who 'doth

what he will in heaven and earth, so that none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What dost thou?' takes care to put himself under the protection of that Being, as his servant and dependant; and, while he serves the Master of the world, enjoys all the security and assistance omnipotence can give him. If he is ignorant, his Master is omniscient; if he is weak, his Master is almighty; if he is at a distance when his enemies are scheming his ruin, his Master is there, for he is every where, and ready to disappoint their malice. In this situation, although he is but a creature, wisdom itself is his guide, and power itself his protection. Thus supported, thus guarded on all sides, whom or what hath he to fear, though earth and hell, though men and devils, were combined against him?

To be more particular, shall this man tremble at oppression, or fear the frowns of the great? Great do I call them 'who shall die, who shall be made as grass?' No, they are wretchedly little; and he that fears God, shall hold both their malice and power in contempt. There is no room to fear a man, though he stands on a hillock a little higher than his neighbours, if we fear God, who is 'higher than the highest, and who,' we know, 'regardeth,' when the proud exalt themselves against his servant. The labourer need not dread the steward, since the common Master of both shall not always suffer the one to oppress the other, but shall level them in death, and rank them afterward, not according to the stations they acted in here, but according to the duty and respect they paid to his commands. Then shall he that humbled himself with the fear of God, be exalted; and he that exalted himself to a contempt of every thing good and sacred, be debased, and brought low, even to hell. God, at the same time that he inculcates the fear of himself by the greatness of his works, forbids the fear of men, who are as grass, and nothing, in comparison of him. 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who are thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man? and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, who hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth?'

The fear of God will also arm us against the fear of censure. He need not much regard the opinions of men, who, through the apprehension of God's displeasure, is doing his

utmost to approve himself to the Searcher of hearts. If he hath the smallest hope of succeeding in an attempt so very exalted, he will be under no manner of uneasiness about their opinions or remarks, who only guess by appearances, and see no more than the mere surfaces of things. He will find little temptation to be vain when they applaud, or ashamed when they condemn, when they know nothing to the bottom, and judge of what they do know, by prejudices so gross, and rules so foreign to reason, that he hath the best chance to pick sense and truth out of their reflections, who interprets them, as he does dreams, by contraries. Mankind are miserably enslaved to foolish and wicked customs, which they prefer on all occasions, to reason, duty, religion; nay, to what they value far above these, their present interest and convenience. By these customs they regulate their behaviour with an exactness never shewn in regard to the laws of God or man. And by these they judge of persons and things, esteeming every thing right that is in the mode, and wrong, that is out of it. Now he that will not submit to be regulated by rules, the observation whereof costs the world both so much pains and money, nay, frequently their souls, is of course hated and aspersed, as a despiser of that which others respect, and consequently as a despiser of them. In this light he meets with far less toleration, than the pimp, the sharper, or the adulterer. If he will neither be drunk, nor make others drunk; if he will keep up a neighbourhood with none but the honest, and the religious; if he makes a difference between dining with a gentleman, when his wife sits at the head of the table, and dining with him, when his strumpet fills the same place; he is a madman, or a hypocrite, or a creature void of common manners and civility, with whom there is no living in society. But if this man truly fears God, he will hear their railleries just as he does the barking of so many dogs; or, in case he lays any stress on what they say, will construe all their censures into applauses, and bless God for bestowing that fear on him, which sets him free from a despicable state of slavery, prided in, and yet suffered with impatience by the rest of the world. What liberty, what courage, what a nobly singular sort of heroism, does the fear of God, in this remarkable instance, communicate to a good Christian! None but they who know

the world, and have been often distressed between its abominable customs, and their own virtue, can do justice to the magnanimity of such a man.

In the next place, The fear of God will rid us of all apprehensions about future events, whether wished or dreaded by vain men, under an imagination, that good or ill success are in all things suitable to the precarious judgments they form of themselves, and what is fit for them. Why should we fear that which can never happen, but by the appointment or permission of Him, who disposes all events, and will certainly so dispose them, as to promote the principal happiness of such as fear and obey him? Fortune is the idol of fools. Providence alone directs and orders all things. If they ever seem accidental, it is owing to our short-sightedness, who cannot comprehend the unsearchable schemes of infinite wisdom; and to our vanity, who think there must be evil, or accident, in that which we cannot account for. But it is quite otherwise with him, who, fearing God, finds there is nothing else to be feared. The event of his suit at law, or of his interest at court, give him no concern. He knows God is in both places, and will order every thing for the best, by a wisdom, which he dare not presume to judge of. If he is in battle, he knows the God of battles is there also, and will choose life or death for him, with infinitely more wisdom and goodness, than he is able to choose with for himself. While others, in the same ship with him, are at sea in a storm, anxiously wishing for one thing, and miserably dreading another, he is on a rock, calmly waiting for the will of him, whom he feared as much at land, as here at sea. For the same reason, the whole train of superstition, dreams, omens, goblins, devils, with which the imaginations of others are so haunted, make no impression on his. In fearing one reality he is guarded against all these imaginary terrors. He knows that which hath no being cannot possibly hurt him; and that which hath both being and malice, he considers as destitute of power to injure him, because subject to that all-ruling hand, which binds the great dragon in chains. If his fear of God enables him to triumph over the devil in his more dangerous capacity, as a seducer, he hath reason to look with contempt on him, as a terrifier or tormentor.

Lastly, The fear of death, that last and greatest of temporal terrors, is swallowed up in the fear of God. He that rightly fears God, considers himself as equally under the divine power in life and death, and in either world. As to death itself, he knows it is a gate that leads to God; a gate, at which he is to take a final leave of all his infirmities, to pass beyond the reach of temptation, beyond the art and malice of the devil, beyond a moral possibility of ever falling from God. His body, he is sensible, may be loaded with sickness, and his spirits sunk in the gloom, which nature throws on this passage; but he knows this will soon be at an end, at a happy end, where he will meet his Comforter, ready to disperse his fears; and his Redeemer, prepared to present him in peace to the Father of mercies. This draws the sting out of death, and gives him that well-grounded calmness and courage at the last, which he never felt who fell for ambition in the field of battle, nor he who sacrificed his blood to false honour in a duel, nor he who, like a coward, took shelter in self-murder from a small part of that calamity his sins had deserved.

Every one fears according to his sense of things. One fears pain; another poverty; another shame; some dread the frowns of the great, and some the agonies of death. Almost every one fears somewhat that he need not fear; that is, every one is a coward in something, but he who, having wisely balanced the weight of things, and finding all things light and insignificant, in comparison of God, fears God alone. Of all men the martyr may be most truly said to fear God; for he would tremble at the most distant thought of denying him, who purchased him with his blood. But does this fear unman him? No; it gives him a resolution, in cold blood, infinitely surpassing all that drums, trumpets, armies, and the prospect of empires, can raise in the breast of the most ambitious. Let persecution seat itself on a throne, and try him with the frowns of power; let it shake its lash, and rattle its chains, and point to its loathsome dungeons, it shall find his soul raised infinitely above all its menaces. Let death present itself in its most hideous dress; let it foam on the jaws of the wild beast; let it groan from the cross; let it devour in the fiery furnace; he shall meet it with a smile, he shall embrace it with a calm and steady

joy; nay, he shall bless and pray for those who inflict it. Is it not true then, that 'in the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence?'

But here some will say, How comes it to pass, that we so seldom see the fear of God produce these courageous effects? Why have they who seem to fear God most, as quick a sense of danger as other men? Granting the fact, which may very well be questioned, it will not affect what I have been saying; because I have been recommending the religious application of this passion in its highest perfection, such as it shews itself in saints and martyrs; and not the partial use of it, as it appears in men who are but half religious. Did we fear God as we ought, we should be lost to common sense, before we could possibly dread any thing else; because all things else, as I have already observed, are only instruments in his hands, and can neither strike nor wound but as he directs them. We do not fear a gun, nor a sword, although instruments of death, in the hands of a friend. Now had we, by fearing and obeying God, made him our friend, we should have as little reason to fear the instruments of vengeance in his hands. Nay, I must insist, that, guilty as we are, or possibly can be, our fear of every thing, but God, is ridiculous, because nothing, but God, can hurt us. I know a thief dreads the gallows. But is he not in this as much a fool as a thief? What would the gallows be to him, more than any other tree, were there no laws nor magistrates to make that gallows an instrument of justice on him?

This most senseless mistake of fearing the effect rather than the cause, of dreading the instrument rather than the person who wields it, is the source of all our sins and sufferings. It keeps us busy in eluding effects, when we ought to beware of the causes. It tempts us to fly to weak helps, and insufficient defences, when we ought to make our peace with the First Cause and Governor of all things, 'whose mercy,' like his power, 'is over all his works;' and who therefore, did we duly fear and apply to him, would at once remove all vain, all slavish, cause of apprehension from us, and make us perfectly safe against every thing that could hurt us. Then sickness, poverty, death, and the like, if inflicted on us, would change their nature from evil to good, and

would only resemble medicines, that are ten times more salutary to the whole body, than they are bitter to the palate. Then eternal damnation itself, instead of being dreaded by us, would become our security against our enemies, in the same manner as the gallows and gibbet are the security of the honest and peaceable man, against the robber and the murderer.

After all, since I have mentioned the courage inspired into saints and martyrs by the fear of God, as a perfect exemplification of my doctrine, they who differ with me, may ask, how the prophet Elias, and the apostle St. Paul, could shew so much fear of human power, as they remarkably did upon two occasions; the prophet, when he fled from Jezebel; and the apostle, when he made his escape from the prefect of Damascus; or how St. Peter could, in so dastardly a manner, forswear his master?

In answer to this, I must remind the objectors, that these holy persons were but men; yet such men, as shewed a resolution in other parts of their conduct, sufficient to justify the truth of what I have endeavoured to establish. I did not, I do not, say, the fear of God can be carried to the perfection wherein I have described it, without the assistance of God's grace, which he may increase or remit, on particular occasions, as he shall judge proper. If on any occasion a man shall shew a contempt of tyranny and death, we must conclude he does it on principles and considerations, about which he is more alarmed, than about all that human power can do to him. If on others he shews a lower way of thinking, this may reflect on him, but cannot depreciate either the reality or virtue of his nobler principle. It only shews he cannot always carry his heroism to the utmost height. Gregory the Great gives a good account of this matter, in regard to the three holy men we are speaking of. Of Elias he says, 'Lest the saints should be elevated with pride, their very virtues have certain measures and bounds prescribed to them. Hence it is, that Elias, while he rises through so many virtues and powers, is checked and limited by certain bounds, as appears, after all, by his flying from Jezebel, who, although a queen, was nevertheless but a paltry woman. I consider this man, of surprising power, calling down fire from heaven, burning the captains with their fifties,

shutting up the heavens lest it should rain, opening them again for the contrary purpose, raising the dead, and predicting future events; and yet, behold! It occurs to my thoughts, how fearfully this very man flies from one sorry woman. I cannot but reflect on the man, so struck with fear as to ask for death at the hand of God, without receiving it, and yet flying from a woman, lest he should meet with it; for he sought for death, while he shunned it. 'It is enough for me; take away my life,' &c. Whence therefore was he so strong in the excercise of those surprising powers? Whence so weak as thus to be terrified by a woman? The holy men of God themselves are both able to do great things by the power of God, and yet, on the other hand, bounded by their own infirmities. Elias knew by those powers, what he had received from God; and by those infirmities, what he was capable of in himself. But as that power was virtue, so that infirmity was the guardian of his virtue.' As to St. Paul, he speaks thus; 'I will utter myself freely, O Paul; dost thou now behold Jesus in heaven? And now fly from a man on earth? Art thou 'caught up into heaven,' and taught the secret words of God, and nevertheless 'tempted by the messenger of Satan?' How so strong as to be rapt up into the heavens? How so weak as to fly from a man on earth? Unless because he who raised you so high, confined you to certain bounds, that, while by your miracles you preach up the power of God, you might by your fear put us in mind of our own infirmity.' He delivers himself in much the same manner concerning the prevarication of St. Peter. 'Behold, he, formerly so fearful, now speaks with tongues; now sparkles with miracles; boldly reproves the infidelity of priests and princes; sets others an example of authority in preaching Jesus; is forbid by the scourge to speak in his name, but not deterred; he despises the lashes of the scourgers, who a little before feared the very words, of those who inquired about him; he who trembled at the power of a maid, now presses on the power of princes in the midst of stripes; for why? Being now confirmed by the power of the Holy Ghost, he trod on the lofty things of this world with the heel of liberty, that he might shew the despicable lowness of every thing that presumes to swell or exalt itself against the grace of God.' This he seems to have

copied from St. Chrysostom, who says of St. Peter, 'He who formerly appeared so very weak, as thrice to deny his master, is now kept so firm, by the instructions of the Spirit, that we see him rushing like a lion, on the people of the Jews, and despising a thousand dangers, and death itself.' St. Paul states the thing in relation to himself, and consequently, in relation to St. Peter, Elias, or any other holy man so circumstanced, better than either of the fathers. Having, in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, told them how he had been 'caught up into the third heaven,' he says, 'Lest any man should think of him above that which he seeth him to be, or that he heareth of him; and likewise, lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations; there was given to him a thorn of sin in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him. For this thing,' he says, 'he besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from him;' and that God said unto him, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness;' that is, my divine power is carried up to perfection in the midst of those infirmities, wherewith the men, I bestow it on, demonstrate the presence of my power, as superior to their own, in those parts of their conduct, wherein I think fit to manifest myself.

Since then the holy fear of God is the work of grace; and since God is pleased to bestow his grace on us, so as sometimes to leave us to our own weakness, that we may learn humility and vigilance by a fall into fears more suitable to our nature, than our faith; let us earnestly beseech him to preserve us from greatly or finally falling; and, when we do fall, to rise us again with greater strength to a steady and resolute pursuit of our duty, to the glory of his goodness and power, through Christ Jesus our Saviour; to whom with the Father, and the Holy Spirit be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now, and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXVII.

A PRESERVATIVE AGAINST TEMPTATIONS.

PROV. XVII. 3.

The fining-pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts.

IN the original languages the same words are often used for trial and temptation; and so it is likewise in our old English. Hence it is, that although St. James tells us, 'God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth any man,' yet Moses assures us, that 'God tempted Abraham,' when he commanded him to sacrifice his son. In our language use hath now made it otherwise; for 'to try' is taken in a good sense, and may be applied to God; whereas 'to tempt' is at present always taken in a bad sense, and can only be applied, in strictness, to the devil, or his instruments. The difference between the trier and the tempter lies in this; he who tries, wishes we may resist; whereas he who tempts, wishes we may yield. God, in this latter sense, 'tempteth no man,' that is, leadeth no man into sin; but, in the former sense, he tempteth all men, that is, he tries their faith and obedience, not for his own information, because he knows all men, and foresees all things; but for the exercise of their virtue, and the manifestation of his own justice and mercy. In order to these ends, the wisdom and goodness of which we shall presently perceive, he 'tries our works,' if we may believe St. Paul, 'as by fire,' and lays open, to ourselves or others, both the principles of our minds, and the dispositions of our hearts, by a kind of torture resembling that, wherewith the qualities of 'silver are proved in the fining-pot,' and the purity of 'gold in the furnace.'

There are many of so foolish, so libertine, and so atheistical, a turn of mind, as to argue, that if a Being of infinite wisdom and goodness presided over the world, he must, above all things, provide for the happiness of men; and con-

sequently could neither tempt them himself, nor suffer them to be tempted, because temptations might lead them into sin, and sin into misery.

To answer this, it will be proper to shew, that, whether men are tried by God, or tempted by the devil, God is justified in permitting the one, and doing the other.

After this is done, it may be of some use to consider, how we may so think and act under these circumstances of trial and temptation, as to escape the snares of our enemy, and approve ourselves the faithful and worthy servants of God.

That we may, in our own minds, the more fully justify God in trying us himself, or permitting us to be tempted by the devil, or his instruments, let us consider first, that the world must have been a work utterly unworthy of its Creator, had he not given being to rational and moral creatures. Without these, the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars, had constituted a great and beautiful, but a useless machine. The heavenly bodies would have lent their light, and the earth its fruits, only to beasts and insects. And if there are any works of his above, still more excellent and glorious than those we see, they must have been known only to himself, and served for a vain experiment of his wisdom and power, had no angels, no cherubims, nor seraphims, been created to enjoy them.

Again, had no rational nor moral characters been made, God himself could never have been known, but to himself; the infinitely wise Being had never given any demonstration of his wisdom; the Almighty had never shewn his power; the gracious and good God had never shewn mercy, or done good; the most communicative and beneficent Being must for ever have kept all happiness to himself, and never have imparted the least share of it to any other being; and consequently must have been without love or honour to all eternity.

As this had been directly contrary to his whole nature, and all his attributes, we must conclude, that all his other works were made for his enjoyment of rational and moral beings; and that, had not such been created, the only good and wise end of all his lower works had been wanting.

Observe, I join moral with rational, because we know of

no rational creature, that is not, by the original frame of his nature, so far morally free in fact, as he is rational. Whether God could have endued a creature with reason, and yet made him incapable of a moral choice, as we are not concerned to determine, so we need not stay to inquire. The thing, however, seems impossible. He is not a rational creature, who can neither perceive, nor be taught to perceive, such a difference between a good and evil resolution, as is sufficient to fix his choice. Besides, if neither God, nor his works, could have been known, without the creation of intelligent beings, it is as plain, they could not have been so known, as to answer the ends of infinite wisdom and goodness in giving them understanding, had he not also given them freedom ; for, to what purpose should we know those attributes of God, if it is not that we may love and adore him for the glorious exemplification of both? And how could either our love or adoration be worth his acceptance, were they forced, were it not in our power to withhold them, or freely and gratefully to pay them for the infinite favours we receive? It is surely more worthy of God to court, than to compel, the acknowledgments and services of his reasonable creatures. But all must be either insensibility, or compulsion, if his creatures are not free, as well as rational.

But, secondly, What is a rational being? Is it not one that can know God, and, in some degree, understand and enjoy his works? And what is a moral being? Is it not one, who, knowing God and his duty, is free to perform that duty, or neglect it, to choose good or evil, and to be rewarded or punished, according to its choice? Now, is it not a contradiction in terms to say, there can possibly be a morally free creature, who cannot choose evil, who cannot transgress the rules of his duty? Does not this way of speaking, when applied even to the infinite Being, appear contradictory to our narrow conceptions?

If then there must be creatures, not only rational, but morally free, those creatures must be fallible, and capable of falling from their duty. Yet nothing can be plainer, than that they could never fall from their duty, nor commit the least sin, were they never tried with any temptation to sin. A rational being never does, never can do, any thing, good or ill, without some motive to incline his will ; which,

although it should not be a justifiable motive in itself, yet serves for a reason to him, and so strong a one too, as makes him, in some instances, do that, which he hath other strong reasons for not doing.

It is true, a moral agent may be in himself free, and capable of sinning, when no temptation to sin is thrown in his way; for his moral freedom does not depend on his being, or not being, exposed to temptations, but on the frame and nature of his own mind. Yet it must be granted, that, if he was never tempted, he could never transgress; and, consequently, though in himself a free agent, must for ever act by necessity, and not choice.

Now, let it be considered, thirdly, That, if all temptations to vice were withdrawn, there could be no virtue; because virtue consists precisely in resisting temptations to vice, and in abstaining from wicked actions, when we are strongly allured to the committal of them; and in doing good ones, when great difficulty and pain throw themselves in the way to deter us. If then it were always easy and delightful to do good, and always difficult and painful to do evil, we should, it is true, be ever employed in good, and never in evil actions; but this would neither argue freedom nor virtue in us; we should no more deserve a reward for this, than we do for eating when we are hungry, or drinking when we are dry.

Thus we see, that if our libertine objectors were to model the world to their minds, they would utterly banish out of it all voluntary goodness and virtue; and that, on their principles, we are to expect no goodness from them, unless a good action is always made extremely pleasing to them in the very performance, and a bad one extremely painful in the committal; that is, unless they are forced to be virtuous, which is another contradiction in terms. Whence is it, that men, who pretend to idolize liberty and virtue, and plead for liberty without bounds, should be for throwing temptations, and with them all exercise of liberty and virtue, out of the world?

But, fourthly, It will soon appear from another consideration, that virtue cannot be tolerated in the world, if vice also is not in some sense tolerated; which can never be, if all temptations are to be entirely excluded; for then

the exercise of moral freedom must be excluded, and this will make the manifestation of God's justice impossible. A little reasoning will clear up this point. We must either suppose God will make a secret of his justice, will make men happy or miserable, without letting those very men, or others, know why he does so; or else we must believe, he will give them leave so to act, as may convince themselves, and all who know them, that the Judge of all the earth hath done right, and dealt justly by them, in making them happy or miserable. God, as I have already hinted, needs not to be informed by any trials we can undergo, what sort of men we are, or should be, on such trials; but he tries us himself, and suffers us to be tempted by our enemy, that we may know ourselves, and be either conscious of the virtue, for which we are made happy, or self-convicted of the vice for which we are condemned; and that all who know us, may magnify the justice of God by seconding the sentence, be it to life or death, which he shall pronounce upon us.

As, without temptation, there can be no exercise of virtue, so neither can there be any manifestation of it; for how can any one guess what sort of a man he would be, if he were never tried? And how can he be tried, if he is never tempted? And if, without a trial, he cannot so much as guess, whether he would be constant, or fickle; virtuous, or vicious; how is it possible for others to be, in any degree, either witnesses or judges of his virtue? Now, if neither he, nor they, can at all judge, whether he is a good, or a bad man, surely it follows, that they can by no means glorify the justice of God, either for his acquittal or condemnation. If this were the universal practice of God towards angels and men, it could never be known whether God is just or not; and, consequently, virtue could never be honoured, nor vice disgraced, in the sight of either. How far this would tend to diminish the glory of God, and render ineffectual the sanctions of his law, let every rational creature judge. Thus it is plain, that the manifestation of God's justice, on which his honour, and the government of the universe depend, depends itself on the permission of temptation. St. Chrysostom, in his oration concerning Providence, speaks very beautifully, and very sensibly on this subject. He puts the usual foolish objection; "If God go-

verns the world with power, why did he not, immediately upon the tempter's deceiving our first parents, reduce him to nothing?' And he answers; 'In not destroying the devil, God hath acted agreeably to right reason; for he only persuades, and leaves it in our power to disobey. Why would you,' says he to the objector, 'rob us of the crown proposed to virtue? or deprive God of the glory redounding from our victory? And if many, through the permission of temptation, shall fall into sin, and be punished, is it not their own fault? And would it not be hard to take away from the good all opportunity of exercising their virtue, to save those, who do not suffer so much by the temptations of the devil, as by their own idleness and perverseness? Let us suppose,' continues he, 'that there is one adversary, with whom two champions are to contend; and that of these two, one is a debauched, effeminate, cowardly, wretch; but the other, a man of true bravery, and great prowess. If now you take away the adversary from them both, which of the two do you injure? Is it the base coward, or the resolute champion? No doubt, it is the champion; for, as to the coward, you save the wretch the shame of a present defeat; which will, in the end, be no considerable advantage to him; for you only give him time to plunge himself without the help of an adversary, into infamy and slavery, by means of his cowardice; which he will certainly do, and consequently, will be no great gainer by escaping the present encounter. But then, as to the true champion, you take from him all the opportunity of signalizing his virtue, and rob him of the glorious crown he might have won.'

Lastly, If there is no temptation, there can neither be any transgression, nor any repentance, and, of course, no demonstration of God's mercy. It would be unjust in God to make men sin, that he might shew his mercy in forgiving. But he willeth neither the death nor guilt of a sinner; he only sets good and evil before us; and if we are so stupidly perverse as to choose the evil, rather than the good, we are not to blame him for what may follow. Much less are we to think he acts unaccountably, if he takes from hence a gracious occasion to call us to repentance, and, upon our sincerely repenting, manifests his infinite goodness, and compassion, in forgiving all that is past. Shall not God be

permitted to shew he is merciful, because we are capable of abusing that freedom of will he hath bestowed on us, as the chief excellence of our nature? Or shall we think ourselves hardly dealt with, if, after voluntarily obeying the temptations of the devil, rather than the commandments of God, his infinite goodness, in order to reclaim and save us, should require a total reformation of our manners; Besides, if, in pity to our natural weakness and corruption, he helps us by his grace to make this reformation, have we not infinite reason to bless and magnify his mercy, that does every thing, consistent with our liberty, to snatch us from that destruction, which our own blindness and wickedness are labouring to bring upon us? If a man should drop his purse, as by accident, in the way of his servant, in order to try his honesty, should we charge him with injustice for so doing? And if, having found the servant insnared by his own dishonesty in this experiment, his master should labour to reclaim him; and, on finding signs of amendment, should forgive him; should we say he was accessary to the sin of his servant? Or rather should we not applaud him, as a most indulgent and compassionate master? But if, by these means, the servant should be actually reclaimed, will it not be happy for him, that he was tempted? Was he not dishonest before he found the purse? If he was, surely his master, who could have wished to find him faithful, and by no means tried him in order to make him otherwise, did not make him a whit worse than he found him. Perhaps, if this temptation had not been thrown in his way, his villany had not been discovered, and consequently not reformed. If this reasoning is sufficient to justify such a master, why shall it not be admitted as a full justification, in the like case, of Providence?

It is a gross absurdity to suppose, God could make any being both morally free, and infallible, because nothing can be absolutely infallible, that is not absolutely perfect; and nothing can be absolutely perfect, but God himself. And to what end should any creature be made morally free, if his virtue were never to be tried? If the devil were destroyed, and all God's moral creatures raised to the utmost perfection of their respective natures, this would not prevent the possibility of sin; for there was a time when this was

actually the case; and yet sin, by means of freedom, and of temptations in paradise, nay, even in heaven, found footing in man, though pure and good, and holding a life of peace and joy, on the condition of his obedience; and even in the angels, though created sinless and holy, and possessed, as such, of unutterable glory and happiness.

That thus it is with all the rational and free part of the creation, we have sufficient reason for believing from what we know and feel of ourselves; and, without any farther arguing, we must conclude, if we have not lost the use of our reason, that it is best so, because it is so, let what will come of the wicked. But vain and wretched man must be cavilling, and finding fault, even with the work of God. He asks, Why hath God left imperfection, and a possibility of sin, in the moral world? What a pity it is, that this man of wisdom had not the making of himself, and the world he is to live in! As to the world, he would probably have given it one even uniform surface; or, if he had thought mountains necessary, he would have cut them all out into mathematical figures; he would have taught the rivers to run every where in right lines; he would have made the winds as stationary as the tides, and turned the very thunders into solemn music. Having thus prepared his world, he would have peopled it with beings, rational perhaps, but not morally free; or free, without a possibility of sinning; or rewardable, but not punishable; or forced to be virtuous, forced to choose good, rather than evil; that is, in a word, he would have peopled it with a living system of contradictions.

How infinitely more convenient, more beautiful, and more magnificent, is the natural world, as God hath made it, than it would have been, had every the smallest part been mathematically shaped, and so perfectly polished off, that the eye of a mite could have discovered no irregularity in it! And how infinitely more glorious is the world of created spirits, for being rational and free, and by those means, admitting a trial, than it could have been, had no one had it in his power to be good and virtuous, which must have been the case, had no one had it in his power to be wicked and vicious!

It may be objected here, that, if this reasoning is right, we shall not be incapable of sin even in heaven, nor, conse-

quently, of falling from thence into the place of punishment, though we are promised eternal happiness in the life to come.

On what authority, either of reason or Scripture, the vulgar notion of our future infallibility hath been founded, I know not. But certainly, if we consult either the one or the other, we shall conclude, that, even in heaven, we shall still be but creatures, that is, morally free and fallible beings, for whom it may be possible to fall. The Scriptures tell us, 'we shall be like the angels in heaven,' who, that they were morally free, and capable of sin, is also plain from Scripture, because we are there assured, that many of them kept not their first estate, but did fall into sin, for which, 'they are reserved in chains of darkness, for the judgment of the last day.' Now, that after this judgment, either the good angels, or the souls of just men made perfect, shall be transformed into absolutely infallible beings, we are no where told in Scripture. Indeed the joys of heaven, which we may for ever possess, if we please, and the torments of hell, which we then shall have escaped, shall give us all the security free and moral creatures are capable of, that we shall never fall. We shall be as wise, as pure, as holy, as creatures can be. and herein will consist our security, that creatures so wise, pure, and holy, will never choose to exchange a condition of so much glory and happiness for one of endless disgrace and misery.

But why should I have taken such a compass to justify Providence in regard to temptations? Are not all those things, wherewith we are tempted, made good in themselves, often necessary to us, by their Creator? Were they never used otherwise, than as he, who made them, intended, instead of tempting us to sin, they would only serve as so many incentives to gratitude, and all the other virtues. What then is it that changes them into snares, and provocatives to vice? If the caviller, with whom we are disputing, will look impartially into himself, he shall there find those corrupt affections, those ill-governed passions, that pervert the whole creation, and turn the very works of God, gracious as he was in making them, and useful as they are both in his intention, and their own nature, into allurements and temptations. Nay, he shall find, that their most amiable or ex-

cellent qualities are the very things which tempt him, and induce him foolishly to wish he, or they, had been made otherwise than they are. For instance; to say nothing of wine, of music, or of beauty; the earth itself must either not have been made, or made unfruitful; or ill-disposed men must have been tempted. Mankind never contend for estates, or kingdoms, but on account of what they produce. No litigious suits, no unjust or oppressive wars, had ever been commenced for any portion of the world, had the whole been covered with naked rocks, or barren sands. 'Let no man therefore say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.'

To dismiss this head, temptations to sin there are, and must be, as long as there are moral beings in the world. Man, in particular, during his state of trial, must expect to find the chief force of these temptations arising from within, out of the miserable corruption of his nature; and cannot hope for happiness, till this corruption is purged out, even by a fierce encounter with these trials, which if he cannot stand, he must come out but the more corrupt and vicious. Silver and gold are seldom or never found in the earth without dross, nor man without a natural inclination to sin; but 'the fining-pot for silver, and the furnace for gold, and God's trials for the heart of man.'

Since then there is no declining the fiery trial, it is our business carefully to examine the nature of our temptations, and to look out for the best preservatives against their poison, that we may so think and act, as to escape the snares of our enemy, and approve ourselves the faithful servants of God.

We can never rightly understand the nature of our temptations, till we know ourselves; for it is from the corruption of our own hearts and affections, that temptations draw their force. Were we not our own seducers and tempters, and were it not for the fleshly enemy within, the devil and the world could have no power over us. The same may be said of all the other affections and passions, that is said in the Book of Wisdom concerning fear, that each of them is 'a betraying of the succours which reason offereth.' It is

true, a well-informed conscience protests against sin; but our insatiable appetites, our unclean affections, our violent passions, bring a great majority of votes in favour of it. Hence it is, that small temptations can lead us into a course of wickedness; whereas it requires all the force of reason, meditation, faith, and grace, to win us to a life of piety and virtue. If we examine, why we, who are so light and moveable to vice, are so heavy and hard to be stirred towards virtue, we shall find it owing to this corrupt and sinful disposition of our nature. The enemy seizes us by our affections and lusts, and pulls downward; whereas God, laying hold of our consciences, draws upward. The enemy pulls with, and God against, the bent of all our natural corruptions; and it is happy for us, that, as his hand is almighty, he can pull with sufficient strength.

We should be well aware of this, and also carefully consider by what artful steps the enemy makes his approaches to the will, when it is guarded by a watchful conscience. He conceals both himself, and the sin he would tempt us to; and, masking himself sometimes in the business, the riches, the pomps, of the world, he endeavours to steal in by the postern of pride and avarice. At other times concealing himself in poverty, in trouble, and oppression, he does all he can to frighten us from our post. He attacks our loose desires with the smiles of prosperity and pleasure, and our cowardly fears with the frowns of adversity and afflictions; and, now insinuating, now forcing, his way in at our senses, he tries to lodge and intrench himself in our corrupt affections, from whence, artfully undermining our reason, and violently battering our wills, he presses still closer and closer on our souls.

His most successful engine is our love of pleasure. We cannot live without some recreations and amusements. In these, we think, we may safely indulge, as long as we do not exceed the bounds of moderation. But, unhappily, we are not nice enough in distinguishing the line that divides excess from temperance. Innocent pleasures, as they are called, prepare the way for such as are criminal. It is hard for the heart to stop, once it is afloat on a tide of pleasure. He that is fond of innocent enjoyments hath a loose heart, and is a man of pleasure; and to be a man of pleasure is to

be exposed to the danger of excess in pleasure. That man, who knows not how to deny himself every innocent delight he can enjoy, will not always deny himself those that are sinful.

Our enemy knows this too well; and therefore, that he may not alarm or shock our consciences, he does not all at once tempt us to the blackest acts of sin, such as adultery or murder. No; to prepare us for adultery, he first allures us to intemperance in eating and drinking, especially the latter, which we do not regard as a great sin. Then he melts down our virtue with soft and unclean inclinations, in which we think there is no great harm. After this, it is no difficult matter to give our lustful dispositions a little practice in wanton dalliances, which, proceeding from smaller to greater liberties, fit us for the highest acts of the kind. If he would train us to murder, he contrives to furnish our pride with sufficient provocatives; and, as the proud is always proportionably resentful, the enemy easily finds those, who will ruffle him into anger; and anger, often stirred, at length burns up into that spirit of revenge and malice, which thirsts for blood. Besides, he frequently leads his unhappy slave from less grievous vices of one kind, to more shocking crimes of another, by proposing the latter as a means to screen, or come at, the former. Thus he that cannot cater for his expenses in women, or strong liquors, by fraud, must do it by robbery, and the punishment of robbery, must be prevented by murder.

The case of David will admirably illustrate and enforce what I have been saying. He had taken a loose luxurious nap, after eating and drinking, in all probability, to the full satisfaction of his appetite; at least, we will take it for granted, he had thus pampered his unclean affections, because the supposition is agreeable to the story, and natural. In this unhappy disposition he sees the beautiful wife of Uriah bathing. Perhaps his standing, or falling, on this occasion, might have depended on his eating, or not eating beyond a certain quantity, and on his drinking, or not drinking, beyond a certain glass. Here it was easy for him to stop, had he been aware of the consequence. But having passed the bounds of temperance, and stupified his conscience with sleep, his virtue gave way to a loose desire, which, however,

had he even then resisted, might have been subdued. But now, having an enemy without, as well as one within, to contend with, his passion seizes his will, and the temptation must be brought nearer to him: after this his fall into the horrible sin of adultery became inevitable. And now, mark the infernal progress of sin! having wronged the bed of his friend, that friend must die to cloak the shameful injury that had been done him.

We are sensible no temptation, be it ever so violent, can work otherwise than by thought; and that our thoughts of all kinds are at first more easily banished, or changed for other thoughts, than afterward, when they have engaged the imagination, and put the spirits into a violent ferment. This consideration should be present with us when sinful thoughts begin to assault us. We should then keenly consider, that the devil is secretly present in the temptation; that guilt, shame, and destruction, are behind it; and that the all-seeing eye of God is that moment watching the motions of our hearts. Now is the time to resist with all our might, or to fly from the snare with our utmost speed. If we dwell a moment longer on the sinful thought, it will be then more difficult to get clear of it; and so in proportion, the longer we indulge it. If we give way, it will, in a very little time, draw to itself the force of some violent passion, some vehement affection, or some inveterate habit. With this assistance, it will easily seize the will; and, being once master of the will, we are then actually guilty of the sin, though the outward opportunity of reducing it to practice should be wanting. Isidore gives us an ingenious state of this progress. 'A sinful thought,' says he, 'begets pleasure, pleasure consent, consent action, action habit, habit necessity, and necessity, death;' and so man, entangled in these links, is held, as it were, with a chain of vices. It was, probably, on account of this progress, from less to more, in vices, that our first parents were forbidden, not only 'to eat' but even 'to touch, the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden,' because touching might increase the tempting to eating.

Herein lies the great art of our enemy, and our most dangerous weakness, that we are not much alarmed at the committal of small sins; and that he easily finds means so to manage a small sin, as to make it a snare, and a temptation

to a greater. Could a very bad man see the progress from intemperance to adultery and murder, such a prospect might set bounds to his appetite. But, while this progress lies hid from the best of men, he cannot tell how far his table may be a snare to him. He cannot see the great harm of eating and drinking a little too much, that is, of eating and drinking a little for pleasure, when he hath already sat long enough for nature and necessity, because he cannot see the guilt and misery to which his excess may lead him.

Now, in order to provide preservatives against the poison of temptation, we ought carefully to consider the nature of its progress, as already set forth, that we may know how and when to begin our defence. We see, we feel by our own experience, that every appetite, such as hunger, thirst, concupiscence; and every passion, such as pride, anger, jealousy, is at first a small spark, that may be quenched with ease; but we perceive, at the same time, that it is a spark among very combustible materials. However, ready as they are to take fire, they are not mere gunpowder, at least not in the generality of men. They give us time, if we are on our guard, to extinguish the kindling mischief, before it rises to a raging fire. If it is asked how we shall do this, St. Paul will tell us: 'Take,' says he, 'the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.' The hope of God's everlasting favour, and the dread of his eternal vengeance, which we build on faith, will quickly cool the heat of our appetites and passions, provided we early enough turn our thoughts, from the yet feeble temptation, to a deep and keen reflection on heaven and hell.

But, that the fire of sin may have as little fuel to feed it as possible, we must take care to 'be temperate in all things;' and, if temperance prove insufficient, we must fast, in order to 'mortify the deeds of the body,' and use our appetites to denial, by often refusing them even the innocent gratifications they call for.

And, that a temptation may never take us unprepared, we must be always on the watch; 'For we know not the hour this thief may come.' The enemy, when he finds us ready, armed, and resolute, flies from us, and waits for a more unguarded minute. 'Let him therefore that thinketh

he standeth, take heed lest he fall;' and let him attentively listen to what our Saviour says to his disciples concerning vigilance; 'Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation; and what I say unto you, I say unto you all, Watch.'

As your own strength is by no means sufficient to stand against both the treachery within, and the attack from without, we see our Saviour commands us also 'to pray,' that he who 'neither slumbereth nor sleepeth,' may keep guard over us, and lend us his almighty grace to support us. 'Our eyes should be always on the Lord, that he may pluck our feet out of the net.'

Now, there is nothing so capable of keeping us on the watch, as lively and almost continual meditations on our danger; on the crown we are to receive, in case we conquer; and on the disgrace we are to suffer, if we are defeated. Besides, it is from the depth and strength of these meditations, that our prayers are to derive the greater part of their power.

Among our other meditations, none can be more useful than continual and apprehensive reflections on our own weakness, especially on the particular sin, whatever it is, that doth more easily beset us. Our enemy, like a skilful general, looks out sharply for the weakest places to assault us; and therefore, in these our greatest vigilance ought to stand sentinel, and our firmest resolution to exert itself. When the pleasure of sin begins to close with us at these opener inlets to temptation, we must have a care of foolishly mistaking its wrestling for embracing; for its arms are the arms of Joab, who only embraces, that he may stab; its lips are the lips of Judas, who only hails and kisses, that he may betray. We should consider, if our enemy can have hopes of prevailing over the very best of men, as he did over the royal prophet, a man after God's own heart; nay, if he could have the boldness to attempt the resolution of Christ himself; how can we, with all our miserable weaknesses about us, for a moment intermit the exercise of our spiritual weapons? However, a due consideration of our frailty will contribute as much as any thing we can do, to arm us against temptations, so that 'our strength shall be made perfect even in weakness.'

Nay, as a foolish man assists the enemy to destroy him,

so we, if we are truly wise, may draw very powerful succours from our spiritual adversaries, to support us against their attacks. Does not the frailty of our flesh, so subject, when indulged, to the shock of tormenting passions, and to the rage of painful and mortal distempers, furnish us with a thousand arguments for temperance, that mother of the other virtues? Do not our worldly affairs and interests call on us for sobriety and prudence, and give us a continual opportunity of exercising both? And do not the contempt and misery, into which the devil is fallen, preach up piety and virtue, to a thinking mind, with more persuasive power, than all his art can bestow on his temptations? What is it he aims at? Is it not to make us, like himself, so many hideous and despicable spectacles of misery?

But if the temptations of our enemy have already taken possession of our hearts, or begin to rush on us with more than usual violence, it is then our business to summon all our strength; to call to God, with all the ardour of our souls, for help; and, as fast as possible, to try to stifle the sinful thought before it grows to a design; or to raise in our hearts a settled horror at the black design, if it is already formed. It is found by experience, that prayer, of all things, gives the greatest assistance on these occasions. We cannot long continue both in prayer and under temptation. Devotion and sin are too opposite to subsist for any time in the same mind. If it is habitually disposed to the former, and perseveres in it, the inclination to the latter must give way. When God is thus introduced, his awful presence will soon force the enemy to retire. God is always of a party with the earnest suppliant in distress, and we may be sure the Almighty will not be subdued. Besides, as often as we are tempted to sin, we should remember, that we are Christians; that, by a solemn vow, we have renounced the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh; and that, if we suffer the temptation to get the better of us, we must, for so much, renounce our covenant with God, violate our solemn vow, and enter into a league with the devil. We should also remember, that we are frail and mortal men; and, looking back at the thoughts we had in our former afflictions, or dangerous sicknesses, as well as forward at those

we may yet be forced to entertain, when the next terrible correction shall load us with pain, or dejection of spirits, or threaten us with death, should, in the present trial, take care not to treasure up more wrath, against that day of wrath.

If unclean imaginations assault us, we should reflect, and tremble as we reflect, on the fall of David, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire. If pride and resentment have bloated and inflamed our hearts, we should, with confusion, reflect on our vile offences, and shameful dispositions. What room for vanity towards men, when there is so much reason for humility, perhaps for fear and dejection, in the sight of God! If avarice or ambition have enslaved our affections to the riches or pomps of the world, we should consider the toil or villany, without which neither can be obtained; and the distraction, without which neither can be kept. If unlawful pleasures entice us, we should try to damp the desires they raise in us, by supposing ourselves in the agonies of death, tortured with pain, and terrified with guilt, unable to live, and unwilling to die. When the allurements of sin have seized our corrupt affections, we should consider, that, gaily as they may smile, the wiles of Satan, and the bitterness of death and hell, are concealed under their sweets. When a sinful thought, of any kind, gains ground on us, we should awfully consider, that God, who is present with us, sees it with an angry eye, notes it severely in his book, and will call us into judgment for it. And here we should paint to our imaginations, in the most heightening colours, the terrors of the last day, when we shall stand issue, in the presence of God, of angels, and of men, for all the thoughts, words, and actions, of our whole lives, with all the glories of heaven, and the horrors of hell, full in view.

If we be not lost to faith and reflection, this alone will be sufficient to beat down our most rampant and violent inclination to sin. And, if we are not as much lost to all sense of gratitude and goodness, the consideration of God's infinite compassion towards us, and of our Saviour's wounds, which bleed afresh at our sins, will fill us with indignation at ourselves, for listening a single moment to the offers of his enemy.

If we have such thoughts as these ready, and are watchful enough to urge them home on our hearts, in the heat of our encounter with any temptation, they will soon turn the victory to our side. Then shall our spirits triumph with a joy infinitely more sweet, and more transporting, than all the delights of a sinful life, were they crowded into one moment. Then shall we lift our heads among the Christian heroes, and look down on the Alexanders and Cæsars, who shamefully submitted to those enemies we have subdued. Then shall conscience applaud, and God approve, and the angels above shall sing 'Hallelujah! Thanks be to God, who giveth his servants victory! Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty. In thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for, when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.' Then shall the gracious captain of our salvation, who fought so hard a battle for us, consider us as having fought and conquered for his honour. Now the consciousness of this, in a grateful heart, is rapture and heaven.

O thou Almighty Being, let it please thy infinite goodness to raise in our low and stupid hearts, by the quickening motions of the Holy Spirit, an invincible ardour to pursue such triumphs, to thy eternal glory, through Christ Jesus our Redeemer, to whom, in the unity of the ever-blessed Trinity, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXVIII.

HABIT THE SOURCE OF HAPPINESS OR MISERY.

JER. XIII. 23.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil.

BY thus comparing a habit of sin with the black complexion of an Ethiopian, and the spots on the skin of a leopard, which are natural, and, without a miracle, unalterable; and by maintaining, that either may as easily change the property here mentioned, as he can betake himself to a good life, who hath been accustomed to a wicked one; the prophet seems to intimate the impossibility of breaking a sinful habit. Although it is true, that such figures, as this in my text, are never used, but when the speaker hath a mind to aggravate and stretch the force of what he says; and that they often express an extreme, when somewhat approaching near to that extreme, is all that is intended; yet that is not the case here; the comparison is strict and just. 'The Ethiopian himself cannot change his skin; the leopard cannot change his spots; neither is it possible for him to do good, who is accustomed to do evil.' But it does not follow, that the case of an habitual sinner is therefore desperate; for although by his own strength alone he cannot possibly reform himself, yet, with the assistance of his Maker, 'to whom all things are possible,' and who can purge the skin both of the Ethiopian and the leopard, habitually hardened as he is, he may be reclaimed.

As, however, a man may contribute to that work, which he cannot perfect; as we cannot hope for God's assistance, without using our own endeavours; and as habit, whether good or evil, is a subject of infinite importance to us; I hope we shall not mispend the time in inquiring, what it is; to what degree of power it carries its influence over our thoughts and actions; and how we may strengthen or subdue it, according as it tends to promote or hinder our happiness.

Habit then is that quality or disposition of the mind,

which, being acquired by repeated thoughts and acts of any kind, renders the soul more apt and ready to return again to the same thoughts and acts. Here it is to be observed, first, That the quality or disposition mentioned is either always accompanied with, or rather indeed consists in, a kind of pleasure, which the mind perceives in repeating the thoughts or actions formerly repeated; and, secondly, That this pleasure, so far as it arises from repetition, always increases in proportion to the frequency of the repetition.

Again, It is to be observed, that if any particular train of thinking, or course of acting, is of itself agreeable to our natural inclinations, we are, on that account, the more readily habituated to it, both because nature itself introduces, and afterward nourishes, all habits thus grafted on itself.

And, lastly, it is worth remarking, that (such is the effect of repetition) a habit of liking that which is naturally disagreeable is often acquired, and sometimes carried to such a height, as to make that in some sort necessary, which was at first regarded as odious or pernicious. In this instance, although the object remains still the same, the very nature of the mind is changed, to all intents and purposes, as effectually, as if its original aversion had been totally destroyed, and an inclination, entirely new and opposite, introduced instead of it.

But still it is to be remembered, that the pleasure arising from repetition, whether added to the natural inclination, as in the former case, or forced on the mind against nature, as in the latter, becomes as real a motive to thinking, and through that to acting, in this or that particular manner, as any original sensation, affection, or passion, whatever. This appears by the glutton, who hath a real pleasure in eating, although he is not hungry; and by the chewer of tobacco, who is now extremely delighted with that weed, which was at first as nauseous to him, as to other men.

Now, at the same time that we may thus have new motives, both to thought and action, implanted in our minds, it is worth our while seriously to consider, that few, if any, of these are indifferent as to virtue or vice, and, consequently, as to the happiness or misery of the mind wherein they are found. Either they are moral or immoral in themselves, or produce effects that are. So great a change

wrought in our souls, in the very springs of thought and action, must be a matter of infinite moment to us. We shall be still more sensibly convinced of this, the more attentively we reflect on the force and activity of these habits, which, in certain instances, are frequently found too strong for every thing else within us.

Were there nothing else to prove the power of habit, but that it frequently makes that which is odious extremely pleasing, and sometimes almost necessary, this alone would be sufficient to do it. But, if it is able to do so much against nature, to what lengths may it not carry its influence over our minds, when it seconds, or works with, nature! Experience shews us, that any of our natural affections, or passions, strengthened by habitual indulgence, becomes insatiable and ungovernable. The natural end of eating is, to recruit the wastes of our bodies, and refit them for the offices of life; and, that we may be in no danger of neglecting the necessary recourse to food, the appetite of hunger is given us. But, as soon as this appetite is changed in any man, by a too luxurious indulgence, into a relish for the high tastes of certain delicacies, that man no longer eats to satisfy his natural appetite, nor to support the health and vigour of his body, but to gratify his habit, although perhaps he knows sickness and pain are sure to follow. The natural end of drinking is, to quench thirst, or at most to refresh the spirits, in order to the due performance of digestion, and the preservation of health. But he, who, pleased either with the delicious flavour of his liquor, or with the transports of mirth it gives him, hath, for a long time, accustomed himself to repeated excesses in drinking, now actually wants what at first he could by no means bear, and drinks on, though he knows it will destroy his health, his spirits, his senses, and his life. The rational use of money is, to procure us the necessaries and comforts of life. For this reason it is desired; but, by some men, so long, so often, and at length so ardently desired, that it becomes itself the object of desire, insomuch that the love of it is the very thing that starves the covetous, whose bags or chests are filled with it. I might exemplify the present observation by other instances, particularly by one which modesty forbids me to particularize, wherein nature prompts to the production of a new generation, and

habit, though grafted on nature, tends to the prevention of that, and the extinction of the present, through scenes of filth, of shame, of misery, and of pain, too shocking to be displayed.

On the other hand, there are habits of an opposite nature to these, which, being founded on the purer affections of the mind, teach a man to place his delight and happiness in denying himself, that he may give to others; in mortifying his sensual appetites, and living the life of a separate spirit; in thinking with contempt of that wealth, that grandeur, and those pleasures, which the rest of mankind pursue with such infinite eagerness, while he looks upwards, and habitually pants after things, which his 'eyes have not seen, which his ears have not heard, and which even his heart cannot conceive.' Nature makes us men; the principles of true religion make us wish and endeavour to be good men; but it is habit alone that can wed the heart to those principles; that can subdue its inordinate emotions to their dictates; that can perfect the good Christian, who is prepared to live in the midst of temptations, or die in flames for his God. The mind of man is neither capable of sinking to great depths of wickedness, till long and frequent repetitions have loaded it with habits of sin; nor of rising to the exalted heights of virtue, till use or practice have winged it with a contempt for temporal things, on the one side, and with the love of God on the other. Habit, in a word, finds us men, and makes us either angels or devils. Let our previous principles of thinking, or motives of acting, be what they will, our habits, once they are confirmed, by extinguishing one affection, by inflaming another, and by prescribing our leading pleasures, govern us almost without control. Can he who, for forty years, hath admired and practised, in all his dealings, the strictest honesty, afterward turn a cheat or sharper? Can he who, during a like space of time, hath transacted all his affairs, and pursued all his ends, by fraud and cunning, become afterward a 'Nathaniel without guile' in his thoughts, or artifice in his actions? Although it is true, that a man may by nature be inclined to this virtue or that vice, yet he can never become remarkable for an extraordinary act of either, till habit hath hardened him in the one, or consecrated him to the other.

There is an art in thinking, and a skill in governing passions by principles, which, although it depends on rules invariably the same in their tendency, is nevertheless brought to different degrees of perfection, according to the different degrees of practice wherewith it is encouraged in different men, in the same manner as a bodily craft is more or less perfectly acquired by a longer or shorter apprenticeship. The mind attains to a readiness and agility in pursuing any particular track of thought by use, just as the hand of a tradesman becomes expert and ready at his business by constant application.

But the mind carries its habits to a greater pitch of power and activity than the body; insomuch that it is often hurried away by its habits into thoughts and actions forbid by its reason, its principles, and even its will; whereas bodily habits, though ever so ready to act, never act without orders. The fingers of a musician can perform a tune, or abstain from it, at his discretion. But a mind habitually virtuous or vicious, frequently starts without deliberation or design into good or evil resolutions, and from thence into suitable actions, before it hath time to consider the motives or obstacles to either. And, what is very remarkable, we feel in ourselves, or see in others, instances of this every day, when no new or occasional motive is offered, when we are alone, and in the dark, so that the mind, in this case, works only on thoughts formerly laid in, and is acted purely by the pleasure arising from its habit.

While we are contracting a habit of any kind, the thoughts and acts whereby this is done are generally attended with considerable emotion, and always with a greater or less degree of pleasure, which gilds, as it were, and beautifies to our imagination all the persons, places, and circumstances, that happen to be connected with thoughts so pleasing, and actions so agreeable. The whole smiling scene of circumstances, the whole soothing connexion of thoughts, thus bundled together by pleasure, is immediately painted and stored in the memory. Every repetition of the thoughts raised in us, or of the actions to which we are moved by the object of our habit, being, in like manner, attended with a new set of circumstances, all recommended to the imagination by a still greater degree of pleasure, the whole is com-

mitted to the same store. Now this is so often done, and we take such a pleasure in doing it, that our other notions are forced to give way, and make room, both in our memory and attention, for the endless train of thoughts that wait on the object of our habit; so that, at length, we have little else to think of, at least that we can think of, with much pleasure, but this object. Hardly any thing can fall within our observation, that is not some way or other connected with it in our minds, and that does not therefore agreeably lead our imaginations to it, and help us to recollect all the pleasures and delights we found in it on former occasions. Hence it comes, that, whatever we are doing, or wherever we are going, this pleasing ghost of our former enjoyments meets, haunts, and courts us to a repetition. Of this we think by day; of this we dream by night; for this we plod, we scheme, we labour, as if we knew no other good.

If, for instance, the mind of a man is habituated to piety, and the love of God, having often taken the rise of his contemplations and devotions from the beauty of the creation, from the possessions he is blessed with, from the dangers or distresses he hath been delivered out of, from the virtuous affection of his wife, from the dutiful and promising behaviour of his children, and the like; as often as any of these objects (which is almost every hour of his life) presents itself to his mind, or is presented by time, place, or other circumstances, his heart overflows with joy; and God, the source of that joy, in all the infinite lustre of his goodness, is instantly confessed as such, is blessed, is adored, in a transport that takes up all the soul, and stands recorded in the mind, as an irresistible invitation to eternal repetitions. All he sees, hears, tastes, knows, nay, even all he fears or abhors, are one way or another so connected in his mind with the goodness of God, by the innumerable acts of devotion to which he hath accustomed himself, that nothing can occur which does not lead him to the exercise of his habitual piety. Those things, which rivet the affections of others to the earth, carry up his to God. Thus his blessed habit consecrates the very world, that snare to the souls of other men, into a holy altar, where the heart of this happy man burns and brightens in the love of God.

In like manner, on the other hand, the habitually cove-

tous or incontinent can hardly ever turn his thoughts or senses to any object, which hath not been, by some means or other, interwoven with the pleasures of his habit, and therewith intimately mixed in his depraved imagination. Hence it is, that circumstances and occurrences, the most remote in the nature of things, give him occasion to reflect with pleasure on past gains, though ever so unlawful; or on past enjoyments, though ever so brutal; and to wish for a repetition; which, if obtained, fills his imagination with a new set of circumstances, that serve only to multiply the provocatives of his vice, and the handles by which temptations may seize him. As every thing puts a pedant on talking of his books, and a tradesman of his calling; so every thing furnishes the covetous, or the lewd, with an hint to think of the sordid or sensual pleasures his vice hath habituated him to; to wish for greater of the kind; and with all his might to follow the bent of that wish, till it is crowned with success, and feeds his habit with an additional incentive.

No more, I think, need be said to prove the power of habit to hearers, who, if they reflect at all, cannot but be sensible of the truth I have been enforcing. It is now time attentively to consider, that, if habit can thus change the very nature of the mind, can give us new motives to action, can so greatly strengthen our former ones; and, by so doing, can, with incomparably more force than every thing else in the world, determine us to virtue and happiness, or vice and misery; we ought, undoubtedly, above all things, to guard ourselves with all possible watchfulness against the introduction of bad habits; to labour in the conquest of them, if already introduced; and also to do our utmost to adorn our minds with such as are of a religious and virtuous tendency.

The methods to be used in preventing, or inducing, bad habits being pretty much the same, but requiring, in the latter case, a more skilful and resolute application, I shall begin with it, because there is no introducing good habits, till the bad ones are removed. We must first 'cease to do evil,' before 'we learn to do well.' No habit of virtue can possibly be acquired, while there is still an opposite habit of vice in full possession of the heart. The latter must not

only be broken down, but the very ruins and rubbish of it must be removed, and the ground cleared, or the former can never be erected in its place; nor will the Spirit of God enter, till 'the evil spirit is driven out.'

But, before a man can think of subduing an evil habit, he must be sensible he is subject to it, and apprized of his danger, in case this necessary reformation should not be effected. Now, it is the unhappiness of those who are subject to these habitual distempers of the mind, to think too well of their own condition, to look on themselves as free from habits of vice, or to consider them as less inveterate than they are. 'We generally despise the first approaches of bodily disorders,' says Seneca; 'for instance, when we are attacked by the gout, we say, we have wrenched our ankle, or hurt our foot; but, as soon as the distemper arises to a great height, we become but too sensible of our real ailment. But it happens otherwise in disorders of the mind; for in them, the worse we are, the less sense we have of our disease.' St. Chrysostom says to the same purpose, 'If our clothes are new and clean, we take all the care in the world to preserve them so; but, when they are once spotted in several places, we are in little pain, though they should become wholly foul.'

But if a man is so given to any particular vice, that neither reason nor religion, nor even its present ill effects on his fortune, his health, or his character, can hinder his falling into that vice, as often as he is tempted to it, he may assure himself he is not only the habitual slave of it, but so far gone, that it is well if he ever gets clear of it.

However, he can hardly be sensible of his condition, without a most earnest desire of reformation, because he knows, in case his wicked habit is not subdued, he is undone. To effect this necessary work, he ought to consider, that so far as any of his evil dispositions may be called a habit, so far it owes its strength to an accustomary repetition of such thoughts and actions, as that particular disposition prompts and tempts him into. As then it grew and gained upon him by repeated practice, so it is impossible it should ever be weakened or conquered, but by an obstinate abstinence from all such thoughts and actions. In bodily habits we find, that barely not doing, will in time disable us from

doing that which we were ever so expert at. The tradesman, who hath for awhile laid aside his tools, and the musician, who hath not, for some time, exercised his fingers, do both lose much of their skill, and return with some stiffness and awkwardness to their respective arts; and, did they entirely disuse them, they would, at length, become as great bunglers at them, as those who never knew any thing of the matter. It is just so in habits of the mind. The good and the bad are alike learned, by practising and repeating, and unlearned again, by neglecting or abstaining.

But, this admitted, how shall he who knows it, and is desirous to have recourse to it, find sufficient resolution to stifle such thoughts, and abstain from such actions, as have, for a long time, afforded him the chief delight and pleasure of his life? What shall enable him to persevere in this resolution, not for a day or month, but for a course of years?

Here, it must be owned, lies the difficulty; so far as the preparation for this encounter depends on himself, he is to set out with a deep sense of the present miseries his wicked habit involves him in, and of the far greater evils it will certainly bring upon him, if it is not thoroughly subdued. In order to this, infamy, sickness, death, or damnation, according to the quality of his habit, are to be so feelingly and closely connected with it in his apprehension, that it will be impossible for it, at any time, to tempt him with the pleasures of a repetition, without shocking him, in the same instant, with those alarming consequences. As this connexion between a habit of sin, and its miserable effects, is founded on the nature of things, and necessary, it will be the easier for him to fix it in his imagination; and every woful experiment he ventures to make against his good resolution, will quicken and force the sense of it home upon his heart, provided he is not wholly lost to reflection.

Armed with this awakening apprehension, he is to draw his next argument, both for expedition and perseverance, from the very nature of habit itself. He knows that every habit, whether good or evil, grows still stronger, the more it is indulged. Now, as he is not so lost to God and himself as to have no thought of breaking his evil habit, and reforming some time or other, so he ought to consider, that this great and necessary work will be the easier, the sooner

he sets about it. He should consider also, that, as long as he continues to act in conformity to his habit, his own natural resolution is decaying, the violence of his temptations increasing, time slipping by, death and eternity hastening forward, and the grace of God insensibly forsaking him; and all together conspiring to render the work of reformation impracticable. Lastly, he should consider, that he is all this time acquiring a still keener taste for vice, and losing all relish of virtue; losing sight of all the arguments and motives to a good life, and plunging yet deeper and deeper into temptations and motives to wickedness. Religion, and heaven, and God, are withdrawing and disappearing very fast; while infidelity, and sin, and damnation, and the devil, are advancing upon him with the same haste. This is a dangerous, this is a frightful situation. A mind just entered into a habit of sin, is in a state much resembling that of him, who is falling from a precipice. Could it, in the first moment of its fall, catch hold of any thing to stop it, it might still be preserved; but, if it misses this opportunity, it quickly gathers such force from its very fall, as must, without a miracle, dash all its hopes of salvation to pieces. If the man, thus circumstanced, is a lover of liberty, (and who is not?) how can he think, without a deep and settled indignation at himself, on the despicable state of slavery to the very worst of tyrants, into which, like a fool, and a coward, he is plunging headlong? How can he submit his neck to a yoke so shameful and so galling, without considering, that, if it is suffered to rest there any time, he will begin to look on it as a bracelet, and an ornament; and then farewell to all attempts to shake it off! Can he possibly think with patience of still going on to insult his Maker, and infinite Benefactor, by abusing and perverting the nature God hath given him? and, instead of acting like a reasonable creature, can he be content to live and perish like a beast; and, after death, to sink into disgrace and misery, into chains and darkness, with the devil and his angels? Can he rest in such a thought as this? Can he, for a moment, balance on it between his duty and his habit? No; surely he is not so abandoned, so lost to common sense. If he is not, let him instantly have recourse to the advice of St. Chrysostom, who recommends solitude and retirement as

necessary in such cases as his. 'The subduing an evil habit,' says he, 'is very difficult, because it is supported by pleasure; whereas virtue, to one accustomed to vice, is attended with much labour and irksomeness. God, in order to break the Hebrews of the wicked customs they had contracted in Egypt, led them into the wilderness; and, in that situation, formed their minds, by trying on them all the forch both of harsh and gentle methods. And even with all this, a perfect reformation could not be immediately brought about. While they were fed with celestial food (such is the force of habit), they still longed for the onions, the garlick, and the flesh-pots, of Egypt, to which they had been accustomed.' However, though solitude alone may not all at once be able to work a cure, the habitual impressions of sin remaining with us, when the tempting objects are removed; yet these impressions will grow every day weaker, when those objects are no longer present to renew them. And here the powerful aids of religion may be called in by ardent and uninterrupted devotions. Here, instead of the allurements that perpetually solicit us in the thoroughfare of the world, proper mortifications may be applied to subdue the passions, and empty the mind of its long-contracted filth. Here heaven in all its glories, and hell in all its horrors, may be calmly contemplated at leisure by the mind, now vacant of other objects, less fit to be desired or feared. Here we may awfully meditate on the wisdom of God, from which we cannot hide; on his presence, which we cannot fly from; on his justice, which we cannot biass; on his power, which we cannot resist. Here the motions of his Holy Spirit may be attended without distraction or dissipation.

For our encouragement to attempt the reduction of our evil habits, the Saint just now quoted, places almost the whole difficulty of reformation in the beginning; and experience teaches the same thing. 'As soon as a disorder, says he, 'is past the height, health begins to return. Abstain from vice for two days, and you will find it easier to do it on the third. If afterward you add ten, you will find encouragement to lengthen out the time to twenty, then to a hundred, and so to your whole life.' This expedient, though perhaps to a man of wit it may seem ridiculous, loudly speaks the wisdom of its contriver. Such arts are

as necessary to wean men from their habitual vices a those used with children in respect to the breast. St. Bernard prevailed on a nobleman of his acquaintance, who had led a very bad life, to try the experiment on himself. 'He began with advising him to make peace with God. The other answered, he could not do it, he was so accustomed to sin. Make a truce with him then, said the saint. How shall I do that?' said the nobleman. 'Abstain,' said the good man, 'for three days, from all manner of sin, for God's sake. This done, he made him do the same for the apostle, then for the martyrs, then for the confessors, &c. After the sinner had gone through his course, he said to St. Bernard, I now am determined, not on a truce, but a peace with God. I now no longer perceive any great difficulty in being good.' Had he been to make a report some years afterward, when habits of piety and virtue were contracted, he would, I question not, have represented the good life he then led, as full of consolation and joy.

He, who hath subdued an evil habit, will find it no very difficult task to acquire a good one. As abstaining from sinful thoughts and actions, proved successful in the former work, so continually repeating and practising the contrary, which will soon become delightful, must ensure success in the latter. All the same considerations and helps, made use of in conquering a sinful habit of any kind, are equally applicable to the acquisition of the opposite good one. The mind therefore, on its quitting a bad custom, ought to continue in the same motion and direction, till it finds itself fixed in the contrary habit, first, because perhaps such a motion may not be easily recovered, should it be suffered to cease; secondly, because that is the very motion requisite to the attainment of the contrary good habit; which, in the third place, is necessary to prevent a relapse, and to prepare the mind for thinking rightly, and doing good, wherein consists the perfection of this work; God requiring it of us, not only that we should cease to love vice, and to do evil, but that we should also love virtue, and learn to do well.

Perhaps I shall make myself better understood by instances. What is it that enables the covetous man to get the better of his habit? It is certainly the consideration, that his vice is mean and foolish in itself; and that it alien-

ates the heart from God, who hates it, because it is idolatry. He who quits it on these accounts, ought for the same reasons, never to be satisfied with himself, till he abhors it, and finds a pleasure in generously distributing so much of his substance as he can spare, to the necessities of others.

The incontinent, in like manner, if by abstaining from wanton thoughts and practices, because they bring remorse on his conscience, infamy on his character, sickness on his body, and ruin on his soul, he hath broken the force of his sinful habit, ought not to stop here, but should pursue the same salutary way of thinking, till he arrives at a settled detestation of the vice, in which habitual chastity consists.

If he, who hath been accustomed to think lightly of religion, and to make a jest of its truths or ordinances, hath, by a serious conviction, been converted from so impious a habit, ought he not on the strength of the same conviction, to go farther, and labour to habituate his soul to an ardent love of God, and an awful respect for his religion? Whatsoever it is, that cures him of his contempt for religion, ought it not to warm his heart in its favour, with unfeigned zeal and affection? There is here no room for coolness or indifference.

There is a greater difference, than is generally imagined, between not being covetous, and being generous; between not being lewd, and being chaste; between not being profane, and being pious or religious; and, in all other instances, between not being vicious, and being virtuous. A mere negative virtue, consisting only in the absence of vice, is neither a sufficient principle for the service of God, nor foundation for the happiness of man; nor can it possibly have any security of its own continuance. The mind cannot be long indifferent or neuter between vice, which seems to bid so high for the heart, and virtue, that really does it. But, if it could, is indifference a foundation for happiness? Or will such a neutrality satisfy that Master, that Creator, that Saviour, that Comforter, to whom we are so infinitely indebted?

There is no comparison between the difficulty of breaking an old inveterate habit, which arms itself against us with the long-tried pleasures it offers on compliance, and contracting a new one, in order to which we have, at worst,

nothing more to overcome, than a mere distaste; which, as it proceeds from disuse, may soon be converted into satisfaction and pleasure by practice. But till the mind can reward itself with this pleasure, in the growth of a good habit, it ought to give alacrity and perseverance to its resolution by strongly connecting in the imagination the delightful hope of pleasing God, of fortifying the soul against temptations, and of qualifying it for the performance of great and worthy actions, and the enjoyment of endless happiness and glory, with the habit proposed. Relying on the strength of a resolution raised by so noble a prospect, and confident of divine assistance, let it trust God with a trial, that it may see whether its attempt will not be soon blessed with some degree both of success and satisfaction. If it argues a base and slavish turn of mind, to submit and rest contented under the tyranny of a sinful habit, it shews an equal degree of cowardice and laziness, not to aim at the attainment of a good one. Both demonstrate a distrust in God, and a desperate state of the soul.

If sinful habits are not prevented, or early corrected, there is too much reason to apprehend we shall never get rid of them, either in this life, or in that which is to come, A wicked action, once committed, is more easy to be committed again. What conscience scruples at first, it swallows afterward, without misgiving. One sin, though ever so abominable in itself, becomes a sort of precedent for another of the same kind; so that time and practice insensibly give authority, as it were, and sanction, to sin. Vice grown hoary with age, sets up for a sort of respect, and claims somewhat like a right from long possession. Hence it is, that, 'in process of time, an ungodly custom, grown strong, is kept as a law,' but we should ask ourselves, whose law? Is it not the law of him, who is an enemy to all the goodness, and all the happiness, of men? And have we so little sense or spirit, as to submit tamely to the law of such a tyrant, and such a deceiver, who is to punish us even for our obedience? Our strength in resisting temptations, before we are lulled asleep in the lap of sin, is like that of Samson, before his locks were shorn, and forsakes us unaccountably afterward; on which we are blinded and bound without resistance, and carried captives by custom to do the drudgery

of sin in fetters, which if we shake off with our bodies, it is the utmost to be hoped for. Could we see through the momentary pleasures that tempt us into habits of sin; could we foresee the extreme difficulty of breaking a habit of sin, once it is confirmed, together with the infinite miseries it must infallibly bring upon us, if not totally subdued, (and who so blind as not to see these things?) we should be ashamed to call ourselves rational creatures, did we not, with all possible expedition and resolution, labour to prevent or conquer every habit of sin.

As, on the other hand, without habits of virtue and goodness, it is impossible to be happy, ought we not, from the first hour of serious reflection, to resolve on entertaining our minds with a continual round of religious meditations, and constantly exercising all our powers in acts of virtue, that religion and virtue may root themselves in our hearts, may grow up to maturity in our affections, and plentifully shed abroad their lovely fruits in all our actions? The entrance into all arts and habits is attended with some awkwardness and distaste, especially when we begin to practice, in order to a habit directly opposite to a wicked one lately laid aside. But a little time and resolution will enable us to get the better of this rawness; and still, as we become more expert and ready in the practice of what is right, we shall begin to find the more satisfaction in it, not only because it is agreeable in itself, but because pleasure always waits on habit. We easily learn arts that please, and contract habits in which we find, or hope to find, delight. And why should not those of virtue be the most delightful of all? If peace and satisfaction within, if credit and honour from without, if self-approbation in all we think, if courage and cheerfulness in all we do, if the sweet intercourse of blessings received from God, and of gratitude repaid by an innocent and affectionate heart be delightful, then must those habits, that procure us these immense advantages, be inexpressibly delightful.

Come then, let us waste no more time in words; but, with hearts deeply detesting our evil habits, and earnestly desirous of such as are pleasing in the sight of God, let us hasten to his table; let us devoutly beseech him, with his almighty hand, to root up, and pluck out of our nature, all habits of

sin; and, in their place, to plant those of true religion and virtue, to his eternal honour, and our everlasting salvation; through Christ Jesus our Redeemer, to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now, and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXIX.

THE NECESSITY OF A SPEEDY REPENTANCE.

ISAIAH LV. 6, 7.

Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near.

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he shall have mercy on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

IT is the first principle of every living thing, of the most stupid brute, and even of the most insensible insect, to fly from that which threatens it with misery or destruction, and to seek its own safety and preservation. Yet the most sensible and thinking man must foresee the evils that approach him, and know his danger, before he can make a single step out of their way.

It is not the greatness of the danger we are in, but the keenness of our own apprehensions, that alarms us. Accordingly, our caution is always proportioned to our apprehension. Of two persons, equally in danger, the one shall be struck with a greater degree of fear, and consequently shall take more care to escape, than the other. Of two evils, the one infinitely exceeding the other, the least is often the most cautiously avoided; because it happens through mistake, to be the most sensibly apprehended.

Since then we never proportion our caution immediately to the danger itself, but to our own apprehensions, it must be a matter of the highest moment to us to form right apprehensions of the things, and still the greater any evil really is, and the more likely it may be to befall us, to be propor-

tionably the more alarmed at its approach. So much does it concern us, thus to fit our apprehensions to our dangers, that, in case we do otherwise, we shall sometimes, although in a state of sin, and in the utmost danger of total and eternal ruin, be more careful to shun the inconsiderable or mistaken evils of this life, than the infinite miseries of the next; and as often as duty (which frequently happens) is attended with present danger, shall be too strongly tempted to avoid the danger, by slighting the duty; that is, like an ill-managed horse, that starts from a bird, and throws himself over a precipice, we shall fly from the smaller evils that attend on virtue to try us, into the infinitely greater miseries wherewith vice is punished.

Is it not very strange, that reasonable creatures should so miserably misplace their apprehensions, and know so little how to proportion them to their dangers, when the evils to be apprehended are so widely, so vastly, different both in kind and degree? And is it not matter of still greater amazement, that people who discover, on all other occasions, the greatest sensibility and force of thought, should often be found among the blindest of those, who tremble at mere momentary or imaginary mischiefs, and plunge forward into endless misery, with a measure of stupidity exceeding that of the most senseless brute?

There are several infirmities that help to pass this gross and fatal imposition on us; such as, first, that too great attachment to the things about us, which, engaging all our attention, leaves us little or none for things to come. We are so taken up with hearing, feeling, tasting, seeing, that we can foresee nothing, at least nothing beyond the present state of things. A small screen, placed near the eye, can shut out the most glorious and extended prospect; nor do we even care to look by it, if it happens to catch our observation with two or three pretty fantastic figures, or painted landscapes.

Again, the faith of many is weak, and of course, their apprehensions of misery in another life must be proportionably feeble. Their doubts in this case, contrary to what happens in all other cases, prevent their fears.

Others, although their reason is convinced, and they do actually believe, yet their hearts are not engaged. They

have faith, but it is asleep or dead. They believe, but they do not so much as tremble.

Many, again, dont know the state of their own minds. They are farther gone in sin than they imagine. Habit hath made their vices familiar to them. Besides, they do not much care for discovering deformities in themselves. Thus they are not sure they need repentance; or if they are, yet not knowing the inveteracy of their disorder, they know not how speedy and powerful the cure ought to be.

But farther: Most people are tender of themselves; so that although they believe in a future state, and know themselves to be unfit for the happiness of that state; nay, although they find themselves daily hardening in sin, and drawing nearer to the brink of ruin; yet they so tenderly love their ease, and their pleasures, they so horribly dread the thought of denying themselves, of weeping, of mortifying, of dying to sin, that they are unable to look repentance in the face. Though the gangrene is spreading apace, and with it death is making a hasty progress, yet they cannot resign the limb to the saw, because it will hurt them. The distemper, although extremely dangerous, may be cured; but then the medicine is bitter, and the patient's palate is so delicate, that he cannot swallow it. How then will death, eternal death, go down with him.

Foolish and senseless as he may seem, who is in this unhappy state of mind, yet we frequently see persons of the quickest apprehension, and clearest understanding, thus circumstanced. They believe sin, unrepented of, will be punished with eternal misery. They have at times, a shocking sense of that misery. They are convinced the pleasures of sin bear no proportion to it. All this, however, does not hinder them from indulging themselves in sins of the grossest nature, with as little regard to their danger, as the most thorough-paced infidel or fool can boast of. Strong as their faith is, their passions are yet stronger. Besides, the object of passion is present; that of faith is future; and presence outweighs infinity, in the balance of a sensual or worldly mind. Reason and faith act no other part, than that of spies on the actions of such men.

The generality of ill livers, vainly hoping for length of days, and time to repent, lose the present opportunity, which,

for many reasons, is always the best. They desire and hope for what they are already possessed of, as if they were not to have the same, or greater amusements, to engross every moment of their future time, as it shall arrive. They will soon repent, but not now. This is their rule and resolution to-day; and, in one sense, they are true to it, for it shall be their resolution too to-morrow; and so on, till at length the time comes when they must repent; but, unhappily for them, death comes with it, and it is too late.

It may be, if the nature and necessity of repentance, together with the encouragements, motives, and helps, to it, were brought properly under our consideration, we should not only know better how to set about the necessary work, but find more alacrity to carry us through it.

First then, as to the nature of repentance, we may be sure it is not a mere remorse. Mere guilt is sufficient to condemn us; but it must be something else that can procure a discharge and pardon for us.

Nor is it a bare ceasing from sin, through fear of punishment, or the severity of affliction, or the decay of passion and desire in old age. In all this there is no hatred of sin, nor love of God; but only a chain laid on the neck of our sinful inclinations, which alike disables us from doing good and hurt; whereas, in a true repentance, 'we must learn to do well,' as necessarily 'as cease to do evil.'

Again, it is not a late concern for sin, like that of Judas, when the opportunity and power of repairing the mischief we have done is quite past. Though such a concern should be deep enough to put a man on destroying himself, yet what amends does he make by so doing, either to God, or the world, for all the injuries he has offered to both? Or what account does this enable him to give of the good he had in his power to do, but neglected?

In a true repentance there must be a deep abhorrence of sin, on account of its own natural foulness. Without this we can never be secure of keeping temptations at a sufficient distance. If we do not hate them, we shall be too ready to parley with them; and this is almost necessarily attended with a reconciliation to them.

In sincere repentance, we must truly represent to ourselves the great certainty and severity of the punishment

which sin is attended with. Without thus fixing our eyes on that shocking prospect, the present pleasure of sin may easily find means to entertain our thoughts.

A true repentance is impossible, without the love of God. We are not to hope, that mere selfish motives shall recommend our return from sin. Such may possibly force us to forsake sin; but there must be something beyond those to bring us to God; and nothing but love can do that. We must fly to him, for his sake, as well as our own. Besides, till we sincerely 'love God,' we can have no security that we shall 'keep his commandments.'

Again, in a true repentance there ought to be a strong mixture of shame. Without this, we may be sure our repentance is neither generous nor sincere. We cannot approach God, after having grievously offended him, without being overwhelmed with shame and confusion. If we do, it must argue great hardness and presumption, which are never found to accompany repentance.

Lastly, to distinguish repentance from despair, it must be attended with hope and trust in God. Without this ingredient, the mind will be tempted to abandon itself to all manner of wickedness, as having neither hope of a better, nor fear of a worse, condition. It will be apt to say to itself, as the men of Judah did to Jeremiah, 'there is no hope, so I will walk after my own devices, and will do the imagination of my evil heart.'

If our repentance is enlivened and recommended by these good qualities, it can scarcely choose but be deep, sincere, and lasting; it can hardly fail of producing 'good works, and fruits meet for repentance;' and therefore may justly hope for approbation and acceptance from God.

It is a most dangerous mistake to promise ourselves God's pardon, without an entire change of the heart. If it continues the same, it will produce the same thoughts and desires, and those the same actions, at least as soon as ever the short fit of sorrow for sin is over. It is impossible, 'out of the treasure of an evil heart, to bring forth any but evil things.' We must 'crucify the world to ourselves,' as St. Paul expresses it; 'we must mortify the deeds of the flesh.' We must 'first die to sin,' and then 'be born again, and live unto righteousness.'

A true repentance is no sudden fit nor flash of sorrow

for sin; no start of devotion, that rises and falls with an occasional or accidental disposition of mind. As it is to change our minds from sinful to virtuous, it must be solid and lasting. As in bodily disorders relapses are of the most dangerous consequence, because they fall upon a constitution already worn out and enfeebled; so, in disorders of the mind, they are no less apt to be fatal, because they fall upon reflections already raised in vain, upon baffled resolutions, and broken vows.

To conclude then, repentance is such a hearty sorrow for sin, as is sufficient to make us abhor and abstain from it for the future, and turn all our affections to God, and our endeavours to his service.

If, after forming penitential resolutions, the person should live to make trial of their strength, and find they can really stand that trial, he may then assure himself of the mercy and forgiveness of God; for, as before, his sins made him odious in the all-seeing eyes of his Maker; so his good disposition and behaviour, recommended by the intercession of Christ (in whose blood his former sins are washed away), make him now the object of God's favour. He is not now what he was before; and therefore God regards him in a new light. 'The evil that he hath been guilty of is remembered to him no more. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him. In turning away from the wickedness that he hath committed, and doing that which is lawful and right, he hath saved his soul alive. He hath escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler; the snare is broken, and he is delivered.' He is plucked, as a firebrand, out of the flames of hell, and planted by the tree of life, where he shall bud afresh, where he shall bloom and flourish for ever.

But in case the person, who forms these resolutions of amendment, hath no time left, either to try or confirm them in, it being then impossible for him to know whether his repentance is sincere or not, he must summon all the strength of his soul; he must call in, with the most ardent prayers, the assistance of God's Holy Spirit; and, with the united strength of both, try to tear out sin from his heart: he must, in short, do all he can; that if he may not have assurances of pardon, he may at least have hopes.

But, secondly, as to the necessity of repentance; we all

know that it is absolutely necessary 'we should repent, and be converted, before our sins can be blotted out;' and we likewise know, that salvation, and peace with God, are impossible, without remission of sins. These points are too plain to need any proof. They only want to be considered.

And as to the necessity of a speedy repentance, that too is acknowledged by all, in words; but shewn, in practice, by very few. Did we, with David, seriously 'think on our ways,' we should, like that royal penitent, 'turn our feet unto the testimonies of God,' we should make haste, and 'delay not to keep his commandments,' if it were for no other reason, than 'lest we should be hardened by the continuance and deceitfulness of sin.' If we 'will hear God's voice inviting us to repentance' and pardon, we must listen 'to it to-day;' perhaps, by to-morrow, that gracious voice may cease, in respect to us, for ever. 'We must seek the Lord, while he may be found.' It would be a dreadful thing not to seek him, till 'he hath hid his face from us. We must call upon him while he is near;' for should we defer it till he is withdrawn from us, the loudest and most moving voice of our distress will not be able to reach him. Then shall he be as deaf to our cries, as we were formerly to his. 'Then shall the door be shut against us, and it will be too late to knock.'

Nay, it will be as much too late to knock at our own hearts, if they are once hardened in habits of sin. The entrance there will be every whit as difficult. How deplorable is his condition, who is forsaken by an angry God, and given over to his own impenitent and reprobate heart?

To prevent this terrible fate, we should immediately have recourse to a deep and sincere repentance. If 'the corrupt tree of sin, which bringeth forth corrupt fruit,' whose fruit is death, be suffered to grow for some time, it will mightily increase in size, strength, and hardness; it will strike its roots deep, and spread them far, into the heart. It will then probably exceed our strength to pluck it up, and our resolution to bear the pain of breaking and tearing the heart to let it out. We generally find, upon comparing the present state of our minds with what it was some years ago, that our evil habits have rather gained than lost ground; and that it would be now a harder matter to repent than for-

merly. What conclusion should we draw from this? Should it not teach us to delay no longer; since delays render this necessary work, which is difficult enough at the easiest, still more hard and irksome in itself, and more hazardous as to the success?

Besides, the work of repentance is not only a difficult enterprise, but often a work of time; whereas we are far from having time at our command. If ever we repent, it must be before death has placed us in an unalterable state. 'After death there is no returning' to new trials, no amending nor changing to all eternity; but as we fall, so we shall lie, till the last trumpet shall set us again on our feet, before the throne of God; there to receive the reward of what we have done in the flesh.

A sinner's time, in respect to the work of repentance, is both short and uncertain. It is therefore absolutely necessary, that he lengthen out every moment to an hour, and every hour to a day, by deep and keen meditations, by earnest and vehement prayers, by mighty struggles, and swift advances; for the night comes on apace, when no man worketh; especially if he is advanced in years, or far gone in a mortal disorder. As he is then loaded and oppressed with guilt, as life is leaving him, as eternity advances fast upon him, as God's judgment with heaven and hell is just at hand, he hath not a single moment to lose. He can never do too much, and probably cannot do enough, because all he does is forced by the horrors that encompass him. His not having repented before the approach of death compelled him, is justly punished with the dangers that then affright him. I do not say that he should entirely despair; but I am sure he hath less reason to hope than the king of Nineveh had, and yet all that prince had to comfort himself with, upon the judgment denounced by Jonas, was, 'Who can tell, if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?'

You that have health, and some prospect of life, consider how poor a consolation it is for a man, when sin, and death, and eternity, beset him, to have nothing in that distressful hour to support him, but a bare 'Who can tell?'

You every day almost see instances of dying sinners, who would purchase, were it possible, a few moments of

that time you are now trifling away, with ten thousand worlds, who, terrified with the near prospect of eternal torments, cling to the brink of life, and pant, and gasp, for another moment to be spent in vain cries for mercy, as the rich man did 'for a drop of water to cool his tongue.'

Put yourselves in their condition, and consider seriously how you would wish, that you had repented sooner. Could you work up your imagination to conceive the infinite anxiety of spirit, the anguish of heart, the fear, and terror, and stings, of a guilty mind, that distract their souls, and, if you live as they have done, must also distract yours at the approach of death, it could scarcely fail to rouse you to repentance, and a new life.

While we amuse ourselves with a thousand idle pretences for delay, life steals off unheeded, and a crowd of accidents and distempers are continually snatching here one, and there another, from among us, without giving us the least alarm, more than if we ourselves were immortal, and exempted from casualties and death. What armour hath any one against the strokes of fate, that should make him so secure in the midst of danger? Alas! says he that is in health, how shall I pass my time? Alas! says he that is a dying, what would I give, that I might have leave to spend my life over again! What another kind of a liver should I be! We can stand round his bed, and hear him utter this with groans, like those of the damned; and though we are as wicked as he, cannot lay it to our own hearts, till death puts us where he is, and then it is too late.

If we consider the uncertainty of this life, we shall draw from thence the most powerful argument for a speedy repentance. We can repent no where but in this world, nor any time but in this life. Now we have no certain hold of life. A moment may remove us out of it, and place us beyond a possibility of repentance. Of this we have continual examples; but what are we the better? One drops from the precipice into eternity, and plunges suddenly, and unprepared, into a state that is never to change. Yet this is no warning. The next behind him, who so lately saw his fall, plunges after; and ten thousand thousand instances of this nature amount not to one sufficient caution. The last is as blind and heedless as the first. Those behind do not con-

sider that, 'unless they repent, they shall all likewise perish.' Miserable infatuation! That men have no ray, no glimpse of that sense in this, which they shew in all other affairs of less moment. A trifling affront, or the prick of a pin, is worth preventing; but the danger of dying in sin, and sinking into eternal flames, is not worth one thought.

Let no man deceive himself. To change one's nature, to break off old habits, and contract opposite ones, to deny ourselves, and renounce our pleasures, to die to sin, and to be born again to righteousness, is indeed no trifling, no easy work. Let no one therefore hope that it may be effected in a few days, in the midst, perhaps, of sickness and pain in the body, of confusion and distraction in the mind. Such hopes are deceitful and fatal. The early is, generally speaking, the only true repentance. We should therefore begin in time, before we are hardened in sin, before shame and remorse are worn off, before thought and reflection are stifled, before God hath quitted us, and withdrawn his grace and assistance from us.

Since we must all die, since the irrevocable sentence of nature is passed against us, and we must soon be transported to an endless and unchangeable state, how careful ought we to be to prepare for that state, to labour that it may be a state of happiness and glory, rather than of misery and disgrace! As we are all travelling forward to this fatal hour, we ought to fix our eyes upon it, as the great point where trial is to end, and infinite happiness or misery to begin, where all our virtues, all our courage, and devotion, and faith, and strength, will be wanting to support us in so critical a juncture. How absolutely necessary will it be to have rid ourselves of our sins by a thorough repentance, and to have obtained the powerful assistance of God's Spirit, against we come to contend with the great enemy of nature, the king of terrors, who brings with him pain and anguish to our bodies, and horror and confusion to our minds, be they ever so innocent. How dreadful a thing would it be to have our consciences, on that great occasion, present us with a long and black account of unrepented sins, and threaten us with terrors infinitely more to be feared than those of death! How carefully ought we to guard against this additional distress! And by what means shall we

awaken ourselves to sufficient caution, but by making death the subject of frequent meditation, and attentively considering what it is to die? To die, is to leave this world for ever, to finish our trial, to rise to the state of angels, or sink to the condition of devils.

Since death makes such a total change, and is attended with such prodigious consequences, how strongly ought our spirits to receive the impression and expectation of it! How high ought our hearts to beat at the thoughts of such a change, such an introduction to infinite transports of delight, or exquisite agonies of woe, that are never to end!

I have dwelt the longer on this, and shall take up less time in handling the following points, because the necessity of repenting is not so well considered as the encouragements and helps to it are known.

Let us, however, now proceed, in the third place, to consider the encouragements and helps to repentance.

The greatest sinner cannot say he hath not sufficient encouragement to repent. 'Though his sins be as scarlet,' yet if he 'turns away entirely from them,' the mercy of God, through the merit of Christ, can make them 'as white as snow;' and though 'they be red like crimson,' can cast out the deep stain and die, 'till they be like the natural untainted wool.'

'When the wicked man,' saith God, 'turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.' Here is no distinction made between degrees of sin, nor any sinner excluded, but by his own impenitence, from pardon. 'The Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting, his mercy endureth for ever.' Provided a sincere repentance render us objects of pity, we see the divine mercy cannot be wanting to us. Besides, Christ hath laid down a sufficient price for the souls of sinners. 'He came into the world to save them,' and accordingly hath made a full atonement to the justice of God for all their repented sins. He does more; he 'sits at the right hand of his Fa-

ther, and, having all power in heaven and earth,' makes continual intercession for the penitent.

It is plain then, that if we can turn to God, he will turn to us. But here is the difficulty; how can we turn? Let us not be discouraged. The work of repentance is not, perhaps, so easy as some, and I am sure it is not so hard and irksome as others imagine it.

Repentance hath never so hard a task, as when it is to encounter with inveterate habits of sin: and yet, even in that case, the enemy, if we persevere, grows every day weaker, and the encounter easier to us. No habit, though ever so long indulged, can quite take away our freedom. We can still resist, if we please, and withhold our thoughts, and our will, from sin, provided we have other objects, sufficiently engaging, to employ them; and a little consideration will soon furnish us with such.

Did we not delight in sin, we could easily abstain from it. And could we find pleasure in repentance, we should as easily be persuaded to repent. Now we ought not to think repentance altogether an unpleasant work. It is true, it takes from us many sensual and unlawful pleasures; but then it rids us, at the same time, of all those guilty reflections, of all those infinite fears and anxieties, and of those deep stings, with which conscience wounds the spirit of him who gives himself up to such pleasures. Now I must insist, that if repentance did no more, it would be on that account only, an agreeable work. But it does a great deal more; it gives us such comfort in reflection, such joy in meditation, such sweet fruits of safety, such tender and refreshing hopes, in the places of horrible fears, as are enough to sweeten even its mortifications to us.

How pleasant is it to throw down a heavy load, and give the weary shoulders rest! This pleasure conscience feels upon lightening itself of sin.

How pleasant is wealth, after we have felt the miseries of want! The soul feels this pleasure, when after a long want of all that is good, of all the graces, and virtuous endowments, and comfortable reflections on good actions, in which spiritual abundance consists, it begins to lay by religious riches, and to have 'a treasure in heaven.' Could the

miser transfer his passion to this kind of riches, what a saint would he be!

There is great delight in rising from infamy to glory. Let the ambitious think of this; and, quitting the low pursuit of worldly honour, aspire to a heavenly crown, to an object truly glorious.

There is great delight in throwing off a heavy and galling yoke, and raising the neck to an easy and graceful posture. Let those who are enslaved to sin, the worst of tyrants, and who pant after liberty, reflect on this, and, by a resolute repentance, assert the native, the true liberty of the soul.

There is most exquisite delight in the recovery of health after sickness. Let those whose souls have languished under the fever of irregular desires, or been torn by convulsive passions, apply the spiritual medicine of repentance, and it shall bring with it the unspeakable comforts of spiritual health.

There is infinite transport in being made sure of life, after danger and fear of death. Let those whose sins have filled them with just fears of eternal death, rise by a true repentance 'from dead works,' and they shall be placed in a happy security of living for ever.

In short, if repentance hath its pangs, it hath its pleasures too, and those of the most solid and rational nature. But the helps to repentance, which are sufficient for the work almost in any circumstances, are still a farther encouragement to the undertaking. I shall mention some of the most powerful.

First, An ill liver should consider, that, if he do not repent, he is undone for ever; and that there is scarce any difference between long deferring, and never repenting, as the woful experience of thousands can witness.

But as a person, falling into a habit of sin, may be justly compared to one falling asleep, who but half hears, and half considers, what either the advice of others, or his own thoughts, suggest to him; and as therefore it is necessary, that, like Samson, he should be afflicted to be roused, he should lay hold of sickness and trouble and labour, on those thoughtful occasions, to give all possible life and force to his resolutions. They put him in mind of his own frailty, of life's uncertainty, of God's displeasure. They also incline

him to disrelish the pleasures, and despise the possessions of the world.

This is a most excellent opportunity for him to withdraw his mind from appetite and sense, and to call his giddy thoughts from the windows, where outward vanity hath held them at gaze, and to retire into himself, where the work of repentance chiefly lies.

As soon as he hath got so far, and hath taken a full view of his sinful dispositions and habits, it is then time to bethink himself of proper means to reform them. And here it should be his first care to call upon God's Holy Spirit to direct and succour him, to give force to his reflections, and life to his resolutions. Nor is he to do this only in his private walks, in his closet, and on his bed; but he must wait on God at his house, and at his table. It is in his own ordinances, and at the times and places of his own appointment, that we can best hope to have audience of God. Applications haughtily conducted, in a way of our own, cannot be so pleasing, nor are to expect equal success. But both in his public and private addresses, he should be very constant, and very importunate. He is begging for his soul, and heaven, and therefore should press with all the ardour and vehemence of his soul.

He should also add mortification to his prayers, as an expedient doubly useful, inasmuch as it will give devotion to his supplications, and at the same time directly strike at his evil dispositions. But by mortification I mean, not only fasting, but also denying himself the other pleasures of sense and appetite, which, though innocent in themselves, may either have a tendency to divert his penitential thoughts, or inflame his criminal desires. Besides, it is really of inconceivable use, in conquering any particular inclination, to accustom even our other inclinations to be denied; and the very exercise of dominion over our passions helps to strengthen the prerogative of the mind and will.

Again, it will be of great use to shun the encounter of those temptations, to which we know ourselves most apt to yield. It is much easier to resist our own bad dispositions, when we have nothing else to combat, than when they are inflamed and backed by the presence of the tempting object.

Notwithstanding all the force of passion and habit, yet

we find we have a power over our own thoughts, and can turn them to, or from particular objects. Now, how is it that sinful objects engage our thoughts? Is it not by striking deep into the passions, and settling a pleasing kind of correspondence with them? Let us then give good objects, such as God, our duty, our salvation, &c. the same advantage, by turning our thoughts frequently and strongly, and attaching our passions, to them. How comes it that we find it so easy to entertain good and banish bad thoughts in the time of affliction? Is it not, that the power and displeasure of God, together with our own infirmity and danger, and the vanity of the world, are then more feelingly apprehended? Let us endeavour then to retain the same fear of God, the same humility, the same vigilance, when brighter days, and more comfortable thoughts return. Nay, let us then increase our fears and watchfulness, because it is then we most need them; for then our enemy, who had been dislodged for a time, comes back with his recruit of 'seven spirits worse than himself;' then our vicious passions having been awhile bent down, and held back by an outward force, return, with a kind of spring, to their wonted objects.

How comes it to pass, that even the presence of a person, whom we do not fear in the least, is sufficient to hinder us from committing many of those crimes, which we scruple not in secret? Does not this shew, that the fear of human censure or punishment is strong enough so to bridle even our most inveterate habits, and our keenest desires, as to hinder us from acting in obedience to them? Does not this shew us, that our thoughts, or at least our actions, are still in our power? And if it is the presence of a witness that awes us, how carefully should we guard our hearts, when we know that he who seeth in secret, who is now our witness, and shall one day be our judge, hath his eye full upon us, and is looking us through and through in our most secret moments? It is because we do not see him, that we do not fear him? Surely if we knew a man saw us, though we could not see him, it would effectually destroy our privacy. But there is no such thing as secrecy or privacy. We have always unnumbered eyes upon us. We are perpetually surrounded with invisible beings, and continually in the presence and sight of God. To pretend to hide our crimes in the midst of

so clear and so severe an inspection, is as absurd, as it would be in a blind man, to attempt a theft in the midst of an exchange at noon-day.

I know nothing that could so powerfully suppress evil thoughts, and so totally prevent wicked actions, as the strong and sensible apprehension of God's continual presence. The penitent ought therefore to possess his whole imagination with it, and strike it deep into his heart. If he could but once bring himself to an impossibility of wandering in his thoughts from the presence of God, that alone would perfect the work of repentance in him; that by itself would regulate his whole behaviour, and ensure his salvation.

The penitent should find out virtuous entertainments for his desires, as one of the best preservatives against vicious ones. He should never want an honest employment; for while he is busied in that, he can neither be pursuing unjust gains, nor be so much at leisure for criminal pleasures. He should always consider the shortness and uncertainty of life, and the infinite difference between the things of this world and the next. The grateful sense of God's goodness, the awful fear of his just displeasure, the continual expectation of his judgment, the delightful hope of eternal glory, and the alarming dread of everlasting torment, should take it in their turns to engage his thoughts in deep meditations.

And on those thoughtful occasions he should thus reason with, and question himself:

What am I doing? Which way am I going? Am I doing the work of God, and travelling in the way of his commandments? No. Whom then am I serving? The devil, the world, and the flesh? What! am I in a party with devils? Am I gratifying the devil, and offending God? Am I serving the author of my ruin, against the author of my being and my Redeemer? And how do these masters of my own choosing pay me for my drudgery? In vanity and vexation of spirit, in disappointment and anxiety, in shame and remorse; and, lest the wages of sin should not be fully paid, in death, in eternal death. But what if they paid me with all the pomps and pleasures of the whole world? Would that be an equivalent for my losses? By no means: 'What shall it profit me, if I shall gain the whole world, and shall lose my own soul; and what shall I give,' or what shall I

take, 'in exchange for my soul?' Am I labouring then to undo myself? Miserable man that I am! Would God so reward me, if I served him? No; he would pay me with at least peace of mind here, and an eternal crown hereafter. Shall I not then repent, and return to him? Yes; but may not that be done time enough a while hence? No: time is not at my disposal; and besides, I find, while I defer this work, it becomes every day more difficult, so that in a little time, if I go on, I shall have brought my soul into such a state of sin, that neither that, nor my body, shall have strength enough left to bear its cure; my soul will want resolution, my mind will not be able to endure such trouble, nor my body such disorders, as are necessary to correct and rouse me; and so distraction or death must come upon me, before my amendment can be effected. I perceive then I have not a moment to lose.

I will, therefore, 'afflict my spirit, I will rent my heart, and to my God will I return.' But will God receive me after so many horrid provocations? Yes; if I can return, he is still 'gracious and merciful; he is slow to anger, and of great kindness.' But how shall I return and persevere? Am I able to change and regenerate my nature? With God's assistance I may. I will therefore call to my aid all my own reflections on God's justice, on his mercy, on my own danger, on the uncertainty of life, on the foulness of sin, on death, judgment, heaven, and hell; and having summed up all the reasons for repentance, having summoned all my strength, and cried mightily for God's assistance, will fall heartily to the great work. I will frequent the company of good men, and God's ministers, and call earnestly on them for advice and help. I will 'watch;' I will 'pray;' I will fly to God's house; I will hasten to his table; and being pursued for my life and my soul by the enemy, will cling to the horns of the altar.

May God fill us with such thoughts and resolutions as these; may he sanctify and strengthen them by the assistance of his Holy Spirit; and may he then be pleased to accept of them, through the merit and mediation of Christ Jesus; to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be honour, and majesty, and glory, for ever. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXX.

THE WEAK SHOULD BE WATCHFUL.

1 Cor. x. 12.

Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.

There is no strength nor firmness in man, nor constancy in human affairs. All things, as well within as without us, are in motion; and the ground whereon we are placed, is both steep and slippery. It is however chiefly from within ourselves, from the fickleness of our own hearts, and the violence of various passions, that all our giddy changes, our dangerous agitations, and unhappy lapses, proceed: yet we are too vain to think ourselves so weak, and too apt, when we fall, to blame the circumstances we are in, the accidents that befell us, or the persons we had to do with, for throwing us down. Like children, turning swiftly about, we imagine the whole world is running round, and so vainly endeavour to stop the supposed motion of the world, when we ought rather to fix ourselves. In this whirl we turn ourselves so quickly from one object, desire, or pursuit, to another, that few enjoyments or designs of any kind are brought to perfection. All things seem to dance round us, to present themselves in a swift succession, and retire along the circle, till the megrim of life grows too strong for our heads, and then ensues a fall, into some folly, or crime, or affliction, from whence we rise not again, till the head recovers, and repentance, which is little else than turning the contrary way, resettles all our thoughts and passions.

Some, who think themselves in a firm and standing posture, are nevertheless carried about by swift and various motions; and others, who do really stand for some time, vainly imagine themselves safe against the danger of all future alterations or falls. Yet the caution given to him, 'who thinketh he standeth, to take heed lest he fall,' will be found a very necessary one to him, who actually stands, if we consider either our own weakness, or the sense of standing or falling in this passage of Scripture.

As to our own weakness, we need be at no farther trouble to be convinced of that, than to recollect our past follies, our many and great miscarriages, from whence the too apparent danger of falling into the like again may be easily concluded.

By him, who in the text is said to stand, is to be understood a person, who having embraced the principles of eternal life contained in the gospel, lives not only in the belief, but practice of them. By falling is to be understood, a relinquishing of those principles, either entirely or in part, or acting contrary to them. The former is represented to us here, and in other parts of Scripture, by the figure of standing, because that posture denotes action, resolution, and strength; the latter by that of falling, which shews weakness, failure, and defeat.

The better to know the usefulness of this caution, let us consider a little more at large the weakness of mankind, first in regard to principles, and then in regard to actions; after which it will be necessary to think of some methods to bear us up in such principles or practices, as may be said to give the soul an erect and upright posture.

Our weakness in the choice of principles themselves, as well as in respect to their influence on our actions, is very great; for the mind of man is capable of choosing opinions, not only upon examining and judging by reason, but in some measure upon the recommendation of mere liking and inclination. It is also capable of admitting by those means contrary principles at different times, and even at the same time, when the contrariety is not at all, or but faintly, perceived; which often happens.

This being the case, and our minds so pliant, whatsoever principles education may have instilled during youth, when we come to the use of thought, and begin to feel our passions and desires violently drawing us towards various objects, we find it in some sort necessary to bring those principles to a re-examination, in order to a choice of our own making. But it generally so falls out, that before this examination can be had, or this choice made, we usually fix on some object, or espouse some design, for better, for worse, which our affections have engaged us to. Hence it happens, that such principles, as serve our pre-engagements,

are retained, and those of a contrary influence soon forced to give way to a sort of resistance, with which the mind arms itself against them.

For instance; if it is the purpose of the mind to please and enjoy God in a course of virtue, and to aim at eternal happiness and glory, then those stricter principles, by which the wildness of our nature may be corrected, its filthiness purged away, and the soul exalted to a taste for high and spiritual pleasures, are retained, or acquired.

But if either mere worldly profit, or sensual pleasures, should happen to be foremost in view or purpose, then the more indulgent doctrines of religion are chiefly dwelt on, and greatly overstrained; the severer ones are relaxed, and qualified by this salvo, and that artful interpretation; doubts and cavils are sought for in the understanding, bewildered by loose conversation, or false learning; and corrupt opinions raked for in the foul sink of appetite and affection. If reason is too stiff to yield to this force or imposition, she is diverted from all religious inquiries in a total inattention, by a close application to the business or pleasure of the world, which, being long and constantly persevered in, render the mind forgetful of all its former religious impressions, and almost wholly incapable of new ones. Now the absence of good principles will as effectually serve the purposes of a vicious mind, as the utmost acquiescence in bad ones.

It is certain, as to a numerous class of men, that inclination, desire, passion, and prejudice, dictate absolutely to them. They think of things as they would have them, and feed up their minds with such notions, about religion, as they relish most. They would rather be their own teachers, in order that they may be their own lawgivers, than suffer others to instruct them, who might put a bridle in the mouth of passion, and lay a yoke on the neck of desire. In truth, it is a disagreeable and shocking thing to have a principle within us, which, immediately upon our giving into any pleasure, or delight, examines, with an odious severity, whether that pleasure is consistent with the strictness and purity of a spiritual life, and, if it judges it otherwise, threatens us with no milder a scourge for the enjoyment of it, than hell-fire and damnation. It is to keep his mind clear of so terrible a guest as this, that the libertine flies to bad

conversation, worse books, and to the most dangerous of all seducers, his own dissolute heart. The stricter principles being by these means shut out from his mind, and never admitted to a fair hearing or trial, the heart, in the meantime, melts and opens to all opinions that encourage his pleasures, and countenance his crimes, to all reflections that may help to keep up an irreligious sneer, to all cavils that may raise doubts, and all doubts that may enfeeble his little remaining sense of religion. The weakness of human nature is not more remarkable in any instance, than in this fall from the dignity of a being, born to the free and happy service of God, to infidelity; from thence to brutality; and finally, from that to the nature and condition of devils. Formerly the worst of men waited to be thus thrown down by the enemy of their souls, and their infirmities; but, in these detestable times, they deliberately scheme their own ruin, and exert their utmost strength to make the desperate leap.

There are infinite numbers, who, as if religion were a thing of no consequence, give little or no time or pains to the choice of principles; but either receive no principles at all, living like brute beasts, without God in the world, or contenting themselves with such as their bigoted and senseless parents were pleased to entail upon them. Others, after having received good principles, seldom turn their meditations on them, giving up their thoughts and time entirely to the things of this world, insomuch that their religious impressions, howsoever sound, howsoever alarming, are soon banished from their consciences, and confined to their memories, from whence they are sometimes indeed drawn out to the war of opinion, and employed in disputation; but never against the enemies of their souls.

As to the weakness of man in respect to his actions, it is even greater than that which he shews in the management of his principles. Folly and wickedness divide almost his whole life between them.

However, some there are, whom the grace of God hath forbidden to be included in this censure. These men, in the main of their actions, are enabled to govern themselves by wise and virtuous rules. Others again, after a course of folly and sin, return to their duty, and arm themselves against their known weaknesses, with effectual resolutions. These

two sorts of people may be truly said 'to stand,' and therefore are admonished by the text, 'to take heed lest they fall' from their present virtuous life, to one of sin and wickedness.

As to the first, let him not repose too much confidence in his never having greatly fallen, in his present abhorrence of sin, or love of virtue. These are indeed blessed dispositions, and ought to fill him with comfort and gratitude, but not with assurance or security. He is still but a man, a very weak and fallible man, with many a dark corner in his mind, where evil dispositions lie concealed even from himself; whence they will be sure to rush out against his resolutions, when temptations come to call them forth, perhaps in an unguarded hour, when he is least prepared to receive their charge. He hath not yet sounded the depths of his own false heart, which, like the hearts of other men, 'is deceitful and desperately wicked,' insomuch that 'he cannot know it;' and therefore it is absolutely necessary he should be perpetually on the watch against it. 'There is no man who sinneth not. Who can say, I have made myself clean, I am pure from sins? A just man falleth seven times a day,' and at every fall he is uncertain whether he shall be able to rise again, or not. 'Who can understand his errors? If thou shalt mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?'

But instances will as fully prove, and more strongly enforce, this point.

Adam, though formed in the utmost perfection of human nature, encouraged to duty by all the delights of paradise, and threatened, in case of disobedience, with death; at the request of his wife, and to gratify an impious curiosity, broke the command of his Maker and Benefactor, and eat the forbidden fruit.

Noah, though saved for his righteousness from the universal deluge, soon after this prodigious deliverance, fell into the sin of drunkenness, and lay in his tent naked, and uncovered, like a beast.

Lot, who was 'vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked,' and was saved for his singular goodness from a shower of fire and brimstone, had hardly made his escape, when he got drunk, and committed incest with his own daughters.

Moses, the servant of God, so distinguished for his meekness, 'believed not God, to sanctify him;' but presumed 'to be angry with God, and spoke unadvisedly with his lips.'

David, 'who followed God with all his heart,' who 'was the man after God's own heart,' abusing that prosperity and power, to which God had raised him from the low condition of a shepherd, debauched the wife of a man, who was exposing his life for him; and, to hide the crime of adultery, committed murder.

Solomon, the wisest of men, who by the mere bounty of God was made greatest and happiest of princes, giving himself up to women, forsook his God, and, like a fool, adored a senseless idol.

St. Peter, notwithstanding his boasted zeal for his master, after all the warning given him, and all his professions of fidelity, not only denied but forswore his God and Saviour, just when that Saviour was going to be crucified for him.

These instances, with many more of the like nature, which might be added from Scripture, from profane history, and daily experience, may serve to humble the presumption of those, who lead the most unblamable lives, and put us on our guard. If men, who seem to have been exalted almost above the rank of human nature, who were assisted by an extraordinary influence from God, could fall so miserably low, how shall the best among us, surrounded by so many temptations, betrayed by so many weaknesses, and relying only on the ordinary supports of God's Spirit, think himself safe? Is any man so vain, as 'to think he standeth' upon better ground than these persons, so illustrious for their holiness? let such beware of a fall. There is no turn of mind so stupid, or so dangerous, as confidence in one's self. How many powerful armies have been betrayed to the mercy of a handful of men by pride and security? In like manner, all our other preparations for the war against our baptismal enemies, if circumspection is wanting, must be shamefully defeated.

If one, who hath, for a considerable part of his life, been able to hold on in a course of virtue, is nevertheless in so great danger of falling, how much more strictly and careful ought

he to distrust and watch over himself, who by a repentance is raised from sin, and stands as yet on the brink of a gulf, out of which he was dragged with the utmost difficulty? Let not such a person depend too confidently on the shocking remembrance of his danger, on his abhorrence of sin so grievously tried, on the pleasures he feels upon being restored to a new life, on the throes and agonies his repentance cost him, nor on the strength of his present resolutions, which are too apt to flag, and in time die away. These are, it is true, very necessary and very happy dispositions; but, alas! his natural corruptions, his inveterate habits, may easily prove too strong for them, if God do not powerfully assist him, and if he watch not continually with the anxiety of one, who still thinks his soul in the greatest danger. His work is but just begun; and as, on the one side, his headstrong passions are not yet half subdued, so on the other, his resolutions, which are as yet but half formed, require every moment to be reinforced and fed by keen apprehensions. He hath only just taken the field against his enemy, but by no means obtained a decisive victory. Let him therefore quicken himself with the remembrance of all his former ineffectual repentances, and baffled resolutions, and with the prospect of the great prize for which he runs. Let him keep a watchful eye upon his enemies, and wind up his soul to a high and vehement alarm.

Let us now, in the last place, consider of some means to strengthen him that standeth.

And, first, to confirm him in his principles, it will be necessary to lay it down as a rule, as a first principle, never to consult with appetite or passion about the choice of others. These lawless subjects ought to have no vote in choosing their governors; for, if they have, they will infallibly pitch on such as may encourage, not restrain, their irregularities. The principles of Christianity, which his reason hath already chosen, or approved of, are not to be laid aside, because the corruptions of his nature, which it is the end of those principles to correct and bridle, may bear them with some impatience. It would be very absurd in him, who hath already seen the light, to forsake it, merely because 'it reproves his evil deeds;' and to choose darkness, only because it hides him from himself; to desert his unerring director, speaking

to him through his reason, through his conscience, and through the word of God, and to put himself under the management of those blind guides, his passions. He would not, if he were to travel to a distant city, choose a blind madman for his guide; or if he were to manage a ship at sea, he would not quit the rudder, and leave it to the winds and storms to direct his course. Why then will he suffer his passions to take the place of his reason, as wiser guides to happiness?

As to his reading, if he comes with sufficient abilities and candour to an inquiry about religion, he may safely peruse all that has been written on the side of libertinism, and will return the firmer Christian, when he finds, as he certainly will, that nothing but artful insinuations, senseless jests, and impudent cavils, can be brought against his religion. But if his learning and judgment are unequal to such a controversy, as it is a thousand to one they are, he had better avoid such performances; there not being one of them, that is not penned with infinite art and subtlety. Did I know a book written against Christianity, in a fair, open, and intelligible way, I would advise every Christian to read it: but, after a long acquaintance with such performances, I never yet met with one, that had the least shadow of a title to that honest character.

Nor should the Christian, who hath only knowledge enough for his own use, ever engage in conversations or disputes with persons of loose principles. He cannot reform them, and they may corrupt him. He should therefore leave them to feed the infidelity of one another with irreligious prate, as boys too often do their imagination with lewd discourse; and if he must inquire about the truth of that religion he hath already embraced, should do it in this short and easy method, which can never deceive him: 'Can I be happy without virtue? Can I be virtuous without religion? Do I know of any religion so likely to make me virtuous, as the Christian? Is there not something within me, that requires restraint and amendment? And is there not something in Christianity wonderfully fitted to restrain what is wild, and amend what is amiss in my nature? Am I not in great fears and anxieties for want of an assurance, that I shall be pardoned the sins I have already committed? And does not Christi-

anity set forth to me a sufficient atonement for my sins, and afford me the most comfortable hopes of forgiveness? I clearly perceive it answers all these excellent ends, and comes up to all my wants. I therefore firmly believe it came from the God of truth; and, instead of listening to the cavils raised against it, either by the arts of bad men, or by my own foolish imaginations and corrupt passions, I will for ever rest on it as the very pillar and ground of truth, adoring, with a most grateful heart, the infinitely gracious Author and Giver. I will lodge it in my very soul, and hold it to my heart with such a strength of conviction, and such a steadiness of faith, that life and death, men and devils, shall never be able to wrest it from me.'

Being thus confirmed in your faith, you have now the strongest and surest preservative against falling into a sinful course of life, if you do not suffer that faith to be inactive and dead within you. Turn your eyes therefore continually towards the great things it sets before you, and when temptations begin to assault you, it will shew you God at your side, watching you, and bring his judgment-seat, with heaven and hell, as strongly into your view, as if you were really on your trial; for although you are not actually there, your faith will convince you, that the messengers of justice are now leading you to the bar, and that you have but a few steps to make till you shall be arraigned, and finally sentenced. A good life and heaven are not different things. They are only the inseparable parts of the same whole. You are no sooner entered heartily into the first, than you may find yourself in view of the latter; so that your faith can shew you the bright mountains and shining buildings of the new Jerusalem. Vice and hell are likewise to faith the same thing. The instant you enter upon a course of sin, you are bound over to that place of torment, and may, if faith is not entirely banished, see the smoke of the fiery furnace rising directly before you, and hear the despairing cries and lamentations of the damned. Let these thoughts be ever present with you, that a good intention or action may never offer itself to your will, without heaven to sweeten, nor a bad one, without hell to imbitter, it to you.

But, that you may watch over yourself with the greater care and circumspection, give me leave to lay before you

some of the most prevailing motives to vigilance, besides this already mentioned.

The first may be drawn from the great advantage you have in being at present in a posture of defence, in being at liberty to handle your weapons, and having firm ground to stand upon. To lose this ground, would be the most dangerous thing could happen to you; because possibly enough you might never be able to recover it again. It is much easier to stand against your enemy, now you are up, than it will be to rise upon him, when he has you down. Consider therefore the great importance of your advantage, and labour to preserve it; for perhaps it is your only opportunity, your last stake for salvation. 'Prudence, not repentance, becomes the wise man,' says Epicharmus.

The next motive to vigilance, is the condition into which you must sink, should you chance to fall; and that indeed is dangerous and frightful. To have all your long course of care, and piety, and virtue, or all your anxieties and struggles in the work of repentance, lost; to return to the foul vomit of your former sins; to renew the guilt of all those crimes you had repented of; to set all your wounds a bleeding again; to set all your old ulcers and issues of corruption a running; to see the height from which you have fallen; to gnash your teeth in horror, and almost despair of ever rising again; to have all your former helps to a good life, or motives to repentance, destroyed, or rendered much weaker than they were, and no new ones to relieve you; to have no resource nor refuge within yourself, and far less hopes that God will pity, forgive, or assist you, after so basely deserting him; or, even if he should, to have the whole work of salvation, you had been so long labouring for, demolished, and all to begin again, under great additional disabilities, is one of the most shocking and alarming thoughts that can possibly seize the imagination of man. Look down into this dreadful gulf, and tell us, whether any thing can prevail on you to plunge yourself headlong into it. You know, that, if perseverance is wanting, obedience loses its reward; repentance, all its tears; mortification, all its severities; faith, all its glorious prospects; and hope itself is on the point of expiring. How are you alarmed, when you consider, that 'the righteousness of the righ-

teous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression;' and that, if you fall, 'the unclean spirit, that had been driven out of you, shall return with seven other devils, to make your last state worse than the first.' A baffled repentance is apt to leave behind it a stupid mind, and an insensible conscience. Remember Lot's wife, who, upon looking back on the city of sin, was hardened into a pillar of salt.

The third motive to watchfulness, I shall mention, is drawn from the uncertainty of the time in which it will please God to call for you. As that time steals upon you 'like a thief in the night, and you know neither the day nor the hour of your Master's coming,' you ought to watch incessantly; for should he find you off your guard, or fallen asleep, or parlying with the enemy, you are undone for ever. Death, considered merely as a natural consequence and termination of life, ought not to be dreaded. But when we regard it as the end of all trial, and the commencement of an unchangeable state, in which we shall enjoy the greatest happiness, or suffer the greatest misery, for ever, no subject can serve better to awaken our reflections. But, if you consider that the time of its arrival is altogether uncertain, and that although you may live many years, yet you may die to-morrow; nay, in a few hours or minutes, have your fate fixed for ever, you must indeed be the most thoughtless of men, if you do not stand upon your guard, and do all you can to hold yourself in readiness. When this reverser of all things, this terror of nature, this fixer of your doom, is going his rounds, and every moment seizing in your sight, perhaps at your very side, this young and hale, as well as that aged and sickly acquaintance, is it possible you can sit unconcerned all the time, as if you alone were out of his reach, or no way interested in the change he threatens you with? Can you look on death as the greatest of all terrors, and yet take no religious alarms from thence? It is true there are those, who, living like beasts, entertain the same dread of death that beasts do, and consider it only as a horrid fit of pain, which spoils eating, and drinking, and other animal amusements of the like nature. But you, who are a Christian, cannot be of this number, and therefore must carry your alarms about death to somewhat of infinitely greater consequence than dying itself.

Beside the motives to vigilance, there are many other powerful props to support him, who standeth, and prevent his falling; but he himself must apply them all.

The greatest seeming difficulty in the way of a virtuous perseverance is, that, since the corruption of our nature, we are to work out our reformation in a crowd of temptations, to cleanse ourselves in the midst of filth. But from this very consideration, a great help may be drawn for perseverance; for what can more effectually keep you on your guard, than to find yourself surrounded with enemies and snares? And will not a thorough alarm make you safer, though in the midst of many dangers, than you would be, were there few, and you at the same time careless and secure? You often see people stumbling and falling, through carelessness, upon an even road, while others, who walk circumspectly, pass safely over the roughest. But even sin itself may become its own cure in a sensible mind; for he who is not past feeling, nor deprived of his memory, may easily arm himself with reflections on the foulness and bitterness of sin, already tasted, against enticements to new acts of sin. The world and the flesh, it is true, tempt you; but have you not, after listening to their promises, found them followed with nothing but 'vanity and vexation of spirit?' And having so woful experience for your monitor, can you be stupid enough to believe them again? Have you no indignation to incense you against yourself, for so many shameful falls? Nor no resolution to arm you against the like miserable instances of folly and weakness, for the time to come?

But to give you a sufficient command over yourself, that you may not every moment be in danger of seeing yourself bound, like a slave, by some vicious passion or habit, and carried from your intended course of virtue, or thrown headlong from the height you have already attained to, you must remember to be 'temperate in all things;' you must learn to think with contempt of fleshly pleasures, of temporal possessions, of the pomps and vanities you renounced in baptism. Particularly you will reap infinite advantage from moderation in eating and drinking; the rule of which is, to supply your body only with so much of each as is necessary for your health. You must have been very inob-

servant about yourself, if you have not found, that you are always more addicted to every sort of fleshly desire and lust, after a full meal, accompanied with a considerable quantity of strong drink, than when you have contented yourself with barely satisfying the cravings of nature. Pride, anger, and incontinence, are the distinguishing vices of the high fed. Your lusts will be sure to follow you, like dogs, as long as you feed them. Your soul is, by your religion, engaged in a war with your flesh. Knowing this, will you put weapons into the hand of your enemy? Will you supply his garrison with provisions? A cool head, and obedient passions, are absolutely necessary to perseverance in virtue; and you cannot but be sensible, how much intemperance clouds the understanding, and inflames the heart. Unnatural appetite, like a child, if often denied, will forget to crave; and if you have nothing but your natural appetites to deal with, you have the less reason to apprehend a fall; for although they too are corrupt, yet they are weak and easily subdued.

But farther: As, in order to a final victory over your corruptions, without which you can never be safe, it will be necessary, not only to avoid all provocatives to vice, but also to arm yourself with the weapons of a more exalted virtue, you will find it highly useful to you, to deny yourself on some occasions, even the innocent indulgence of your desires, particularly by fasting, if your constitution will bear it. By temperance you only fight your enemy upon the confines between you and him, and are for the most part on the defensive; but by fasting you make an actual attack upon him, and carry the war into his territories, into his very camp. Temperance may moderate, but fasting will mortify, your inordinate affections. To abstain from sensual gratifications is the best preparative to the tasting of spiritual pleasures, and the enjoyment of God. In abstinence, the soul being disentangled from fleshly appetites, and shut in from outward objects, as if lightened of a heavy burden, finds itself naturally disposed to rise, on the wings of devotion and divine love, to the blessed and glorious fountain of true enjoyment. Although this Christian duty may seem somewhat irksome to you, yet as it may be necessary to your safety in a thorough change of life, you

cannot in prudence neglect it. It is said of the serpent, that, when it hath renewed its skin, it squeezes through some narrow passage, and rubs off the old one. If you are really become a new creature, you will think it no great hardship to wear off the old man, who still sticks to you, and may seduce you, in the severities of self-denial; which, if persevered in, will in a little time turn to pleasures of a most sweet and engaging relish.

Besides, the performance of this duty will give prodigious alacrity and force to those meditations, by which, in order farther to prevent your falling from God, it will be necessary for you to enter deep into your own breast, that you may there, by an often-repeated, and long-continued, and close examination of yourself, find out what to guard against, and on what ill-fortified quarter to place your most watchful centinels, as well as your most powerful engines of defence. Here, in your own heart, is the fountain of all your corruptions, the nest of all your enemies, the proper objects of all your apprehensions, the important field, where the great battle is to be fought, in which your eternal fate is to be decided.

Having thus taken the necessary measures within yourself, it will be then time to call in other allies to your assistance. Then fly, when you are hunted by the enemy of your soul, to the company of good men; and enter with them into serious discourse, about your temptations and dangers; call on them for advice and help; lay yourself under a rule to confess, not only your weaknesses, but your actual sins, to some person, whom you stand most in awe of for his good life, and who, by his skill in religion, may help to rouse, alarm, or encourage, you in the race that is set before you. If you do this, you will find your flagging resolutions kindling, your dying piety reviving, and a surprising reinforcement of vigour, new-edging and new-pointing all the powers of your soul. Such is the balsam that flows from the tongue of a religious and faithful friend. We find in the holy Scriptures, that this practice of confessing their sins one to another, and asking the prayers of their pious neighbours, was very common in the apostolical times. St. James even commands it as a duty; and, to encourage us to it, tells us, in the

same verse, that, 'the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man prevaileth much.'

Lastly, As you will find nothing but enemies within yourself, and perpetual causes of alarm from every thing about you, which neither you, nor all the assistance man can lend you, will be able to subdue, or guard you sufficiently against, you must cast your eyes up to God, and call him into your heart, duly prepared for his reception, with all the anxiety and vehemence of a soul, that sees it is to be utterly undone without his assistance. 'You can do nothing of yourself; but you may do all things in him, who strengtheneth you, and whose grace is sufficient for you.' And lest you should unhappily miss the occasion of receiving the divine succours, you should seek them diligently in the ordinances of God, in his house, and at his table, whither you ought constantly to repair for new supplies. Now, if God vouchsafe you his assistance (which on such application he is too gracious to refuse), and you take proper care to improve and apply the helps he lends you, you may be assured the happy work is done, 'and you shall never greatly fall; you shall stand arrayed in the whole armour of God; you shall watch; you shall stand fast in the faith; you shall quit yourself like a man, and shall be strong in the power of the Lord, and in his might. You shall endure unto the end, and be saved;' you shall 'resist all temptations; and when you have been sufficiently tried, you shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.'

Who folds his hands, when the enemy is laying at him? Who sleeps, when the trumpet sounds to battle? Who feasts, or dances to soft music, or dallies with his pleasures, when his adversaries are shouting for the charge? Who slumbers on the deceitful lap of Delilah, when the Philistines are upon him? O that the battles of religion and heaven against sin and damnation were fought with that engagement of heart and spirit, with that animosity and fire, which are shewn in our wars about worldly trifles! Then should we make glorious triumphs, and reap immortal crowns.

But alas! we either bring not our hearts with us to this spiritual warfare, or find them there among the foremost and most dangerous of our enemies. By what stratagem shall

we win them to our party? Is this so hard a matter? Can the affections of our hearts be set in opposition to God, to Heaven, and our greatest good? Yes; in the most obstinate opposition; but not, indeed, till religion and reason have lost their hold upon our minds; for otherwise, a man could never become so literally and desperately his own enemy, could never suffer so total a perversion of mind, and depravity of nature, as to place his delight and joy in the infallible and known means of his own destruction.

O wretched, wretched man! could he know himself, what a wonder, what a monster, would he appear in his own eyes! How would it shock him, to find himself forsaking God, and leaning on earthly supporters, which have either no strength, or no being, but what his own blind imagination lends them! falling into snares laid for himself, by his own hands! weltering in misery, where he hoped to wallow in pleasure! entering the lists for a kingdom, but shamefully submitting in the first encounter! starting for a crown, but stumbling and falling at every step! and, with heaven and hell placed full in his sight, with reason to direct him, and religion to assist him; yet, as it were with open eyes, led downward to eternal misery! But he is hid from himself, and 'seeing, he cannot see.'

May God of his infinite mercy open our eyes. May he give us strength to stand our ground, that we lose not those things which we have wrought; but that we may receive the full reward of those who continue to the last in his goodness, through the mediation of Christ our Saviour, and the assistance of our ever blessed Comforter and Helper; to whom, with thee, O merciful Father, be all might, majesty, and dominion, now and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXXI.

MAN HIS OWN ENEMY.

GAL. v. 17.

The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary one to the other.

THIS doctrine is the same with that of the apostle, in the seventh and eighth chapters of his Epistle to the Romans; wherein he speaks of 'one law in his flesh or members, warring against another law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin,' affirming that 'the carnal mind is enmity against God.' Nothing in all the Scriptures seems so strange to deists and libertines, as this, which represents the one part of our nature as set in direct opposition to the other, even in regard to duty and virtue, the rules and motives of which, say they, are founded on, and arise out of, human nature, in such a manner, that a man, in order to be good, hath nothing else to do, but to follow his own nature. But if the dictates of nature are opposite, how can they be all right, or all obeyed? Yet, that they are opposite, the experience of every thinking man is sufficient to teach him; for he can never surely deny, that, on many important occasions, he finds one part of his nature hurrying him to certain actions, while another labours to withhold him. If this is not sufficient to convince the libertine and natural man, that all is not uniform within him, let him consult the heathen philosophers, whom he admires, and, to serve a turn, prefers to Christ and his apostles, and they perhaps will do it. Nothing is more remarkable in their writings, than repeated precepts for subduing the appetites and passions by reason; nor in their actions, than such mortifications applied to that purpose, as no hermit need be ashamed of. Had they been supported in this attempt by a tolerable scheme of religion, they could hardly have failed

of success; but vain is the endeavour to remedy irregularities in practice by absurdities in principle.

One of the best methods proposed by philosophy for subduing the passions, is to set them at variance among themselves, so as to make one of them a spy and check upon the other. Thus, fear may be opposed to anger, desire to sloth, and jealousy to love. Aristotle, speaking of this expedient, says, 'The affections, if one knows how to manage them with address, may be employed as weapons against each other.' But Seneca says, 'This might be true, if we could take them up and lay them down at our pleasure, as we do warlike instruments; but these arms will neither obey directions, nor wait for the word of command; but make war of themselves, being as bad servants, as they are masters. That readiness and activity, says he, is to be approved, which goes where it is desired, and no farther; which may be turned from its course, and trained to directions. We know our nerves are distempered, when they move in spite of our wills. He is either an old man, or of an infirm constitution, who runs when he intends to walk. In like manner we esteem those the strongest and soundest motions of the mind, which proceed in obedience to our will, and are not carried on as it were by a will of their own.'

It was impossible for mere philosophers to shew a better talent for invention than the first, or at reasoning, than the latter hath done on this occasion. Thus it is however, that philosophy, groping in the dark, runs counter, and refutes herself. This expedient must indeed be rather prejudicial than useful to mere philosophy, which hath not, in herself, sufficient strength to employ the passions in her service; for she cannot govern them. She must therefore labour totally to stifle and suppress them. But Christianity, more agreeable to our nature, hath, to admirable purpose, built its morality on a scheme not unlike that of Aristotle. Our religion hath placed before desire, fear, and hope, the strongest of our passions, such objects as we can never be too much affected with. These passions, thus exalted by faith above all worldly and seducing objects, in respect to which nothing but change and excess are to be looked for, become infinitely helpful in bridling and subduing all our other affections and appetites. He who hath God to love, heaven to hope for,

hell to fear, can hardly think any thing in this world worth pursuing, that may divert him from objects so infinitely great and excellent.

Nothing more need be said to shew, that there is in man, left to his own nature, a kind of moral war between his reason and passions, to which the compound nature of his being, though it is not the cause, hath given the occasion. The body of man, like the greater world, is made up of ingredients, or elements, directly contrary in their qualities one to another. In the original frame of his nature, these contrarieties were so tempered, and bound together by such a tie, as produced at once an wholesome harmony and necessary variety; but this tie hath since received such a shock from sin, as suffers the several ingredients to return to their natural opposition, and at last dissolve the body.

Between the soul and body of a man there is also, by their very nature, a wide diversity, if not a like opposition. At first the body, with its appetites and passions, was made absolutely subject to the soul, from whence resulted wisdom and virtue. But this subjection hath, by the corruption of human nature, been unhappily changed into rebellion; so that now the spiritual and carnal part of man, draw different ways, according to their different natures, this pulling to vice, that to virtue. Hence it comes 'that in man' (that is, in his flesh) 'dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with him, but how to perform that which is good, he findeth not.' He delights in the law of God after the inward man, but sees, at the same time, a law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, and bringing them into captivity to the law of sin.'

This contest between reason and his passions is, in the best man, who lives according to mere nature, exceedingly sharp; and, for want of better aids than he can furnish himself with, his reason is soon forced to quit the field, and submit to some prevailing scheme of vice, prescribed to him by the flesh, or the world; after which, it only serves to conceal and cater for his vices.

But in the Christian, reason being supported with strong hopes and fears, as to futurity, with lively apprehensions of God's continual presence and inspection, and with the divine Spirit, is enabled to carry on the war against his passions

with better hope of success. Hence the contest becomes more equal, and consequently more fierce and lasting. His flesh contends for present, worldly, and sensible enjoyments; the spirit for good things, unseen, and future. His flesh recommends its choice by the natural sweetness and certainty of the gratification it proposes; the spirit urges the purity and eternity of that happiness, on which it labours to fix his attention. 'The Spirit searcheth even the hidden things of God;' nor is he less perfectly acquainted with those of man, for he is 'the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, and counsel,' and therefore is able 'to guide us into all truth.' Now his compassion and tenderness for us are as great as his wisdom, and it is therefore he is called 'our Comforter.' Under the direction of such a guide, we can never go astray.

But our ungoverned affections are irregular and blind, and therefore surely, of all things, the most unqualified either to direct or support us. While we are under their influence, we are exactly in the state of one who is drunk, and knows not how to stand or walk. Any violent passion disturbs the brain in the same manner as strong liquor: 'There is,' says St. Chrysostom, 'a drunkenness without wine, otherwise the prophet had never said, Woe be to those who are drunk, but not with wine; nor St. Paul, Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; intimating, that there are other things which intoxicate. There is a drunkenness in anger, in concupiscence, in covetousness, in vain glory, and in other affections; for drunkenness is nothing else, but a departure from right reason, and a deprivation of understanding. As he who hath drank much, is lavish of rude words, and sees one thing for another; so a person under the violence of any passion speaks, like a fool, unintelligibly, rudely, and with a strange mixture of silly laughter. His eyes mistake their most accustomed objects, and are often blind to things the most visible. He, particularly, who is angry, is unquestionably drunk; for his voice is hoarse, his eyes are bloodshot and distorted, his understanding is benighted, his tongue faulters, his ears misrepresent what he hears.'

That which puts a man in such a condition, is surely not fit to be trusted with the direction or government of his

actions; for in this state of madness, there is no folly nor crime, which he is not ready to run headlong into.

While our corrupt passions thus bias and pervert our understandings, they, at the same time, as unhappily deprave our will, disposing it to the foulest intentions, and the vilest actions. All the black and horrible crimes, which we come to the knowledge of, by our own experience, or history, spring entirely from lawless and licentious passions. Our desires being fitted by nature to an infinite object, are rendered, in respect to all other objects, boundless and insatiable. Hence it is, that being turned aside from that only object, that could satisfy them, they, in vain, seek for contentment from earthly things. Luxurious tables, delicious wines, stately houses, soft beds, music, lewd women, riches, honour, and power, are pursued with an eagerness and fury, that overturn every thing in their way; treading under foot the laws of God and man, burning cities, wasting kingdoms, and filling the world with fraud and false politics; with rapes, robberies, murders, massacres, and ruinous wars. When one object of this sort proves unsatisfactory, another is sought for, cost what it will to conscience; and that proving as empty and defective, the whole circle of sensuality is rummaged, but to no purpose; all things under the sun are not able to satisfy the immortal soul. 'From whence come wars and fightings among you?' says St. James, 'Come they not hence, even of your lusts, that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not; ye kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war; ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers, and adultresses, know ye not, that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?'

The law was delivered from Mount Sinai, not with the sound of cymbals, psalteries, and other the like instruments of peaceful music, used in religious services, but with the sound of a trumpet, to signify the fierce and perpetual war between the commandments of God, and the lusts of mankind. He who professes himself the servant of God, engages in this warfare against the enemies of God and his own soul. Now this is a war of the greatest consequence; for in this we fight not for riches, nor honours, or worldly

power; but for our very souls, while all the glories of heaven, and all the horrible torments of hell, are at stake; a war truly terrible! A war of a most dangerous and singular nature! In other battles, he who attacks is a different person from him who defends; but in this, I am engaged against myself; I, the inward man, against me, the outward. How, therefore, shall I guard against myself, and deliver myself from myself? It is extremely difficult for the soul to obtain the victory in this case, because it fights against an enemy it loves. 'No man ever hateth his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it.' If therefore, it be difficult to conquer an enemy we hate; what must it be to subdue that enemy, whom we find a pleasure in submitting to, and who can, with the greatest ease, prevail on us to betray ourselves? In every other warfare the combatants sometimes separate, lay by their weapons, and take breath; but in this there is not a moment's respite, the battle is fierce and continual, and the enemies can never be parted but by death. Other enemies pitch their tents apart, and are divided by walls and ramparts; these encamp on the same spot, and therefore can never agree upon a minutes truce.

As, in the present frame of our nature, the soul and body are closely bound together and united into one person; and as our effections and passions proceed entirely from the body; so it always happens, that they rise in vehemence, as that does in vigour, and abate in proportion as the blood grows cool and languid. This is found by experience to be true of them all, excepting fear and modesty, which follow in this respect a rule exactly opposite to the rest. But as these two affections are most easily engaged on the side of religion and virtue, no method can be thought of so helpful to that best of causes, as that which shall strengthen these, and at the same time humble and reduce the others; I mean temperance and mortification.

To this end, in well-disposed natures, a strict and regular temperance will be sufficient.

'He,' says Epictetus, 'who at a feast behaves himself according to the rules of moderation and modesty, is a guest for the gods.' He did not mean, that this only virtue could qualify a person, otherwise vicious, for the company of celestial beings; but that the virtue of temperance, being pro-

ductive of all the rest, must render him who is adorned with it wholly virtuous. Be that as it will, I must take the liberty to say, no one is a fit guest for the Lord's table, who does not shew himself moderate and temperate at his own. We are unspeakably happy, did we observe it, in this, that those temptations, which, in the natural order of things, come foremost, are always the weakest. Temptations to intemperance may be easily resisted; for the mere pleasures of the palate, when nature is satisfied, are very inconsiderable. But if we once yield to intemperance, it is then a task of no small difficulty to bridle those lusts and passions, that are fed by it. This, however, is considered only by a few, who, of all men, stand least in need of remarking it; I mean those whose appetites are moderate, and passions manageable. In these, the principles of Christianity require no other assistance, than such as may keep the passions within the bounds of moderation, and render them barely amenable. But in persons whose passions are naturally more violent, there is a necessity for the severer measures of fasting, and other acts of self-denial. There are two ways of preserving and promoting the virtue of a Christian, either by strengthening the Christian principles, which, humanly speaking, is to be effected by reading the word of God, and by meditation; or by weakening the principles of vice, which is the work of temperance in a few, and of mortification in the rest of mankind. If temperance alone can so reduce the passions to reason, that they may be won over by that and faith to Christianity, the work is done in the most effectual manner, by a revolt of the enemy's forces. But when this intention cannot be accomplished, they must be subdued by mortification, and thus either converted, or conquered.

As to temperance, it is of so great use to virtue, that the worst religion, with it, can do more than the best without it. Nicolaus, speaking of a Scythian nation, that lived entirely on milk, says, 'None of them was ever known to be moved with envy, hatred, or fear.' He says also, of the ancient Iberians, 'That when they came to full growth, a girdle was given to each of them, of a very moderate length, which, if it ever grew too short for the wearer, he was publicly exposed as an infamous person.' This people was also re-

markable among their neighbours for the practice of every virtue. The Americans, and inner Africans, who are wholly ignorant of the gluttony and luxury of Europe, are also utter strangers to the horrible vices of the Europeans.

Libertines think a religion that is unable to restrain a luxurious glutton from pride, lust, and anger, cannot be the true religion, although they might, with as much reason, say, water is not water, because a small quantity of it cannot extinguish a fire, into which great quantities of oil or sulphur are perpetually thrown. Without any regard to this, they are continually twitting us with the morality of the Americans. But were they and we to exchange religions, we should be infinitely a worse, and they incomparably a better people, than they are. The religion of those people, is almost wholly calculated to spoil their morality, ours to render us highly virtuous. Yet such is the force of temperance, that it makes even the worshippers of the devil chaste, sober, and honest; such is the effect of luxury, that it turns the worshippers of the true God into the servants of the devil.

Moderation in diet, keeps the head clear, the spirits calm, the passions manageable, confirms health, and prolongs life; among all which, it is hard to single out that one, which conduces most to a virtuous and happy discharge of duty. There is no other man, but he who practices this mother virtue, that is, in any sense, master of himself. 'I do insist,' says Agapetus to Justinian, 'that you are truly a king, because, being adorned with the crown of temperance, and clothed with the royal robe of justice, you are able to rule and moderate your pleasures. Death follows every other sort of power; but this extends to all eternity. All other principalities find an end in the present world, but this delivers from eternal punishment. The king is lord of all men, and, in respect to God the fellow-servant of all men; but he is then more especially styled lord, when he is able to lord it over himself, and is not enslaved to foolish pleasures; when supported with the alliance of reason and religion, which maintain an absolute dominion over the irregular affections, he subdues his otherwise all conquering desires with the whole armour of temperance.'

He who governs his appetites by the rules of temper-

ance, as he hath all manner of advantages over the luxurious in respect to virtue, so hath he this also in relation to pleasure; that whereas the most relishing delicacies are hardly tasted by him, who treats his palate with nothing else, so the plainest and most insipid food seems high-seasoned to him, who is accustomed to nothing more delicious, and who stays to be hungry before he eats. 'The full soul loatheth a honey-comb, but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.' To fare pleasantly, and sumptuously, are two different things; for we see one person feeding deliciously on the poorest diet, while the stomach of another turns at the richest dainties. Intemperance turns the sweetest morsels of the luxurious into filth and poison; but self-denial is that stony rock, out of which God fed his people with honey.

How miserable, and yet how ridiculous, a thing is it, that he, who studies nothing but his pleasures, and sacrifices his soul to them, should be almost wholly disappointed of his hopes! The weakness of our nature will not permit us to enjoy that excess, which its depravity will not suffer us to stop short of. God hath so made us, that one and the same method is necessary to the improving our pleasures here to the height, and insuring our happiness hereafter, that is, temperance, which consists in a due medium between the extremes of riot and austerity. If allured by appetite, we rise above it, we inflame our passions beyond a possibility of being governed, and are disappointed of pleasure now, and happiness for ever; if compelled by the natural fierceness of our passions to use violence, and curb them by mortification, we must be content, I own, to want a great part of the innocent comforts, which the temperate man enjoys in this world; but then we provide for our happiness in that which is to come.

We are so miserably blinded by the customs of the world, that we neither see things in their proper lights, nor are able to trace them to their immediate and manifest causes. Hence it is that we so often foolishly express our wonder at the horrible vices of the great, not considering, that it is impossible, men so softened by ease, so steeped in luxury, so pampered with riot, should not be absolute slaves to their appetites and lusts, and through them, to every

enormity the devil himself could practise, were he in their places. What are their fortunes, their studies, their time, applied to, but to excess and pleasure? Consider a little, what is the grand end of that prodigious commerce which extends itself to all the corners of the world. Is it not to supply the wealthy with articles of luxury? The beasts of burden by land, and the ships by sea, have little else to do, than to furnish materials for their houses, their tables, their apparel. View them in their palaces, splendidly furnished; in their clothes, gorgeously laced and brocaded; and at their tables, loaded with pampering food, and inflaming wines: see them carried sometimes by beasts, sometimes by men, from one wanton entertainment to another, courted to vice, and flattered to folly, and you will quickly perceive, that pride, lust, and impotence of will, must reign absolutely over their hearts. And you know, where these have taken up their abode, deceit and inhumanity can hardly be wanting.

Now let us follow these men to the stage of action and business, that we may see what effects passions, so disposed, may have upon their lives and conversations. Extravagance, like that just now described, requires an infinite expense to support it. All arts, such as gaming, fraud, perjury, are set at work to raise money. The fox is called in, to cater for the wolf; and, if he fails of a supply, the wolf himself goes out, and with unrelenting oppression, grinding the face of the poor, and plundering the widow and the orphan, sweeps all before him. In the mean time, the fire already kindled among his passions, by luxury and riot, must have vent; at first it smokes in libertine discourse and oaths, and immediately after blazes out in adultery and murder.

To clear the way for passions and practices like these, conscience must be priestcraft, and Christianity a lie. There is nothing more certain, than that the kitchen and cellar, are the true fountains of libertinism and deism. The divines, who have laboured to refute those destructive novelties, by reason, have mistaken the root of the controversy, for want of looking carefully into those two places; which had they done, they might have seen heresy turning on a spit, and libertinism ripening in a hogshead. The bad principles of the high fed are but the excrement of gluttony and

drunkenness. The reason of the luxurious, is placed over the boiling furnace of their passions, and so heated and clouded in the steam arising from thence, that all applications to their understandings must be vain and fruitless.

Let us leave them to live and perish like the beasts; and address ourselves to those, who, finding in their hearts the same outrageous appetites and passions, do nevertheless, as yet retain some sense of religion, and some desire to provide for the safety of their souls. These men, although sorely pressed and overpowered, are yet in the field against the flesh; and we may ask them, whether, if they were to lay siege to an enemy's fortress, they would supply it with provisions? Or, if they were to defend a garrison of their own against a powerful assailant, whether they would not bind and imprison such partisans of the enemy as should happen to be within the walls? Their answer is ready; they certainly would. Is it possible then, they should not know, that their passions are enemies and traitors to them, or that luxurious living is the very food and fuel of their passions? If they are convinced of these things, nothing can be more plain, than that recourse must be had to great temperance at all times, and often to fasting and other acts of mortification. If a man is really a Christian, let him examine himself by his former experience, whether luxurious, or low living, contributes most to the government of his passions; and if he concludes in favour of the latter, then let him ask himself, whether he can be so mad, as to lay a greater stress on riot or abstinence, than on heaven or hell; so as to lose the company of angels, and take up for ever with that of devils, for the sake of such company as meat and drink can draw together, who for the most part have little to distinguish them from dogs and ravens, assembled by the scent of carrion.

But if he is not convinced, that high living is so great a provocative to his passions, nor abstinence so powerful a bridle, it is perhaps because having never tried any but the former, he thinks the violence of his passions is owing to nature, not intemperance. That it is, in some measure, owing to nature, is very certain; but he will never know how great a share of the blame is to be laid on intemperance, till he tries what moderation and abstinence will do. If he

consults the word of God for satisfaction in this point, he will there see the effect of intemperance on the passions. Lot gets drunk, and commits incest with his daughters. Esau sells his birthright for a morsel of meat, and becomes a fornicator and profane person. David, after a full meal, falls immediately into temptation, and commits adultery. St. Paul advises us, 'not to walk in rioting and drunkenness;' nor in, what are the almost necessary consequences, 'chambering and wantonness, strife and envying. Those who live in pleasure on the earth, who are wanton, who nourish themselves as in the day of slaughter,' are noted by St. James, as 'grievous oppressors.'

If he is not convinced of the expediency and duty of mortification, let him hear the words of our Saviour: 'Enter in at the strait gate. He that will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross.' Let him also hear St. Paul: 'The world is crucified to me, and I to the world. I chasten my body, and I bring it into subjection, lest, after I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway. They that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts. If ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the flesh, ye shall live; make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.'

Pursuant to these divine authorities, all those holy men, who have ever been distinguished among Christians for the exalted goodness of their lives, have been as remarkable for ruling over their appetites and passions with a severe and heavy hand. When wars or other public calamities threaten us, we see the nation flies to fasting, as the most powerful enforcer of prayer, as that which, according to St. Basil, furnishes it with wings. To fast and humble ourselves before God, is the surest means to turn away national judgments, as may appear by the cases of Ahab, Esther, and the Ninevites.

Whosoever is sincerely concerned at the violence of his passions, and willing to restrain them, will see sufficient reason, in what hath been said, to persuade him, that self-denial may possibly answer his intention herein; and this persuasion ought at least so far to prevail on him, as to make him resolve on a trial, which, if he is not made of other

materials, and cast in a different mould, from the rest of mankind, must be attended with success.

Without the assistance of God, use what means we will, it is presumption to hope for a victory over ourselves. But before we can hope for the Divine grace, we must shew a willingness to do that which is in our own power. Besides, we cannot expect that God's Holy Spirit should take up his abode with us, while his enemy the flesh is countenanced and supported by all the tenderness for it we can possibly indulge it with.

If, however, the sincere Christian shall once begin thus to 'prepare the way of the Lord, and to make his paths straight and smooth,' he will have all the reason in the world to depend upon the assistance of God, in finishing so good and gracious a work; for there is nothing a man can do so acceptable in the sight of that most compassionate Being, as subduing his unruly passions to the divine will. Such a sacrifice of self-love to God, such a denying of ourselves to please him, is the most agreeable and glorious offering we can make him. All afflictions contribute to a good life, but that most, which we voluntarily lay on ourselves, through a hatred to sin, and a sincere desire of approving ourselves dutiful servants in the eyes of so good a Master. Our heavenly Father is better pleased to see his children afflict themselves for their faults, than to be obliged to lay his rod on them; and what he approves of, he will bless and assist.

We are however to consider, that God is far from approving of mortification, merely for its own sake. He delights not in the afflictions of his creatures. He hath filled the world with objects fitted to entertain our senses and passions; and while we enjoy them innocently, and with a due sense of gratitude to him, he is as well pleased with our enjoyments, as he was with those of our first parents, before they fell. Nor does he accept of them as the punishment or atonement of our sins, having appointed the blood of Christ for the one, and eternal misery for the other. He only approves of them, when they are applied to the curbing and reforming the irregularities of the passions. For this reason, till our fasts reach the mind, they are no fasts in respect of religion, or in the sight of God. 'If in the

day of our fast we find pleasure,' or if, what is worse, like the Pharisee in the parable, we think ourselves, on account of our mortifications, better men than others, or even presume, as he did, to boast of them in our prayers to God, we have his own word for it, that they are 'an abomination in his sight.' We are therefore, according to the admonition by Joel, to sanctify our fast; that is, to make it the instrument of reformation in ourselves, and of charity towards others.

A man cannot call fasting an act of self-denial, till he can say, his belly is himself. 'If the belly only,' says St. Bernard, 'has offended, let the belly only fast; but if all our members, and affections, and the soul itself, have sinned, let them all share in the austerity. Let the ear fast from its itch of impertinent news and vain conversation; the tongue, from detraction and idle words; and, above all, let the soul fast from its love of vice, and its fleshly will.' 'The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but justice and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.' 'We ought so to chasten our bodies,' says Maximus Taurinensis, 'as, at the same time, to feed our souls with all the virtues. Let therefore destructive luxury, and odious contention, and cruel oppression, fast. Let the poor be fed, provided it is not with the spoils of the poor. To what purpose is it to abstain from meat, when that which is more filthy than the vilest kind of meat, reproach, detraction, lies, and oaths, are all the time issuing from our mouths? Are we not sensible, 'that not that which goeth into the mouth defileth the man, but that which cometh out of the mouth?'

Upon the whole, fasting, with other acts of mortification, rightly managed, and properly applied, help to purify the heart, to raise it above the world, and open it to the motions of the Holy Spirit. They add surprising vigour to the resolution of a Christian, in his war with the flesh; or at least, which answers the same end, they greatly enfeeble the enemy. 'They dry up the sink of our vices,' says St. Cyprian, 'and so extinguish the Etna of our passions, that the neighbouring mountains are no longer scorched by that furnace of infernal fire. They cast out devils, and, as St. Chrysostom observes, raise us, for the time, above a dependence on earthly food, to the life of angels.' We are, by nature, half angel, half brute. We must rise towards the one, or sink

towards the other, and, at length, associate to all eternity, either with angels or devils. To feed, to strengthen, to exercise, the spiritual part of us, is to rise. To feed, to strengthen, to exercise, the brutal, is to sink, and be lost for ever. 'We lost the innocence and dignity of our nature by eating,' says St. Athanasius, 'and must restore ourselves by abstinence.'

A man may say, although I feed well, I hope, by reason and resolution, to keep down my inordinate desires. Vain are the hopes of such a person. The saints and hermits, with all their amazing mortifications, found this no easy task, such is the corruption of human nature, since the fall, in which the soil of the earth, and the soul of man, fell under a like curse. Much labour and violence must be used to both, or they will produce no fruit; and, after our utmost pains and skill, we must expect, along with the crop, to see tares, briars, and thorns, shooting up every day. Men feed themselves up, through an unhappy indulgence to their desires, with hopes of travelling downward, through a broad smooth road, to heaven, and entering into it by a wide and open gate. Although our Saviour gives a contrary account of that journey, yet flesh and blood, relying more on hope in themselves, than faith in him, would needs endeavour to make it a mere jaunt of pleasure. Even those who think self-denial necessary, are often too tender of themselves to put it in practice. They will fast to get rid of a slight bodily disorder; and yet will not do as much to be cured of disorders that threaten the soul with eternal death. O astonishing! that a short, uncertain, miserable life, should seem to a thinking being, more worthy to be preserved and provided for, than that which is eternal, and may be rendered infinitely happy. A man may be as indulgent to his internal enemy as he pleases; yet he may assure himself, the corruptions of flesh and blood are not to be cured by delicate, but severe methods; not to be rubbed with soft cloths and napkins, but rather with the potsherd of Job.

'Nobody hears,' says St. Augustin, 'the tempter, saying within him, What do you mean by your fasting? Why do you defraud your own soul? You punish yourself; you are your own tormenter: he is a cruel master you serve, if he is pleased with your misery. Answer him thus,' says that

writer: 'I torment myself, that God may spare me; I suffer, that God may forgive, and that the flesh may hang less heavily upon my soul; knowing well, that the victim must be flayed and mangled, before it is laid on the altar.'

The sickness, which hath been bred out of delicacies, can sometimes be purged away only by bitter or nauseous medicines. Shall we still continue to think the delicacies good, and the medicines evil? No; all is not good that pleases, nor all evil that gives pain. Now, nothing but good is the object of choice; and therefore we ought, after having carefully distinguished the real, from the seeming, good or evil, to embrace that which is good, not that which is pleasant, and shun that which is evil, not that which is painful. If then luxury, and riot, and voluptuousness, are condemned, both by Scripture and experience, as hurtful to the soul, let us, like rational creatures, detest and avoid them, be they ever so grateful to our corrupt inclinations. If, on the other hand, temperance and mortification are, by the word of God, and the trials that have been made of them, found to be highly instrumental in promoting the virtue and real happiness of mankind, let us, in the name of God, as becomes men of sense and Christians, determine to be at all times temperate in all things; and, when occasion requires, if our constitutions will bear it, to mortify the deeds of the flesh, be it ever so irksome to the brutal part of our nature.

And may God, of his infinite mercy, accept our sacrifice herein, and, by the power of his Holy Spirit, crown our warfare with a glorious victory, and an eternal triumph, through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom, in the unity of the ever-blessed Trinity, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXXII.

THE PROGRESS OF MAN.

Psalm viii. 5.

Thou hast made him but a little lower than the angels.

Although these words, and what follow in the three next verses, are, in their more important meaning, to be understood of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and accordingly are by St. Paul applied to him in the Epistle to the Hebrews; yet are they as applicable, in their first, simple, and immediate sense, to man in general. It is plain, David had the infirmity, and the seeming insignificance of human nature under consideration, at the uttering these words of the same psalm: 'When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?'

But he is comforted again, when he reflects, 'that God hath made man only a little lower than the angels; that he hath crowned him with glory and honour;' and that he hath, by the prerogative bestowed on him, as a reasonable creature, in the first of Genesis, 'given him dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every thing that moveth upon the earth.'

The words of my text, together with those that follow, thus understood, shew us, what reason and observation also render probable, that man is placed in the middle, between the angelic and brutal nature, being a little lower than the former, and at the same time holding dominion over the latter.

It is a thing very remarkable, that all the orders of created beings, known to us, form a kind of scale or chain, wherein the lower is always linked to that above, by somewhat common to the nature of both. The nature and qualities of lifeless matter are found in plants; the vegetable life of plants, in brutes; the senses, appetites, and affections

of brutes in man; and the reasoning faculty of man, in angels. That this communion of natures ascends still higher than we can possibly trace it, is very probable; since, so far as we are able to pursue it, no breach nor interruption can be discovered; and since, in holy Scripture, a certain distinction of order and dignity among created beings, of a class superior to our own, seems plainly enough pointed out to us by the terms angels, archangels, principalities, powers, dominions, thrones, cherubim, and seraphim, which had never been used in the same sentence, and immediately following one another, had it not been the intention of the Holy Spirit to express to us some distinction or subordination in these superior creatures.

With this chain, or gradation of created beings, there seems to be joined a certain progress of each, at least for a few links, from lower to higher, or the contrary; a rise from the class below, to the excellence of that above; or a fall from the class above, to the insignificance and baseness of that below. This we may observe, in matter, for instance, which rises from dead earth to plants; from plants to animals; or sinks from the bodies of animals into plants, and afterward, upon the dissolution of those plants, rots, and is reduced to common dirt. That there is a like improvement or degeneracy in the world of spirits is most highly probable, and the rather, as every man may observe somewhat like it in himself; for we are never at a stand, but always ascending to a greater perfection in virtue, or descending to grosser acts of vice and wickedness.

Man borrows one half of his nature from creatures of a superior, and the other, from creatures of an inferior order; and, thus compounded, links together the chain of beings by standing between the angel and the brute, and bearing an equal relation to both. He hath, in common with the first, a reasonable soul, which may render him a free, a moral, and a religious being; and he hath, in common with the last, an animal body, with senses, passions, and appetites, that may engage him in gross and brutal pollutions. So far as he is a spiritual being, he may aspire, through virtue and piety, to the nature and dignity of angels; and, so far as he is an animal being, he may degenerate, through vice and irreligion, to the abject nature of a brute. What

limits God hath assigned to either progress we know not; but, forasmuch as the Divine nature is at the head, and the diabolical at the foot, of all beings, it seems impossible, that a creature so progressive in virtue and vice as man is, should not always either improve in angelical goodness to a greater resemblance of God, or grow more brutishly wicked, to a still nearer and nearer likeness of the devil.

Pursuant to this observation, there are three states, in one or other of which every man may be found.

The first is of those, who waver between virtue and the angelical nature, on the one side; and vice, with the brutal nature, on the other. Religion and conscience, having laid hold on their understandings, teach them to look upward, and labour to improve and refine their nature to a resemblance of better beings than themselves. During the influence of these principles, they rise to some improvement in piety; but are soon thrown down again to low thoughts, to gross and vicious actions, and consequently to a depravation and corruption of nature, by the force of violent temptations, working on the brutal part of their composition. A man of this turn, having too much understanding and conscience to be completely wicked, and too much of appetite and passion to be uniformly good, 'is unstable in all his ways.' One hour, his religious, his laudable ambition to be somewhat more than a mere man, raises him above himself, and forces even his passions to second his reason and principles; the next, his fleshly appetites and brutal passions, taking the lead, sink him as much below himself, and the rank even his mixed nature entitles him to in the scale of being, insomuch that his 'understanding is darkened,' his very reason for a time depraved, and his principles perverted or biassed to a miserable compliance with such intentions and actions, as better become a brute than a man. The one half of his nature seems to consult apart from the other, and even sometimes to act by itself, as if he consisted rather of two distinct persons, than two different parts. Take him when the spiritual part of his nature prevails, and you conceive hopes of his becoming in time a saint or an angel. Take him when the brutal part hath the mastery, and you cannot help fearing, he will at length degenerate into a brute or devil.

This war between the law of spirit and flesh, both of which are strong and active within him, not only makes it uncertain, as well to himself as others, what he is, or will be, but likewise renders every one of his actions, whether virtuous or vicious, so very defective in its kind, that it is impossible to judge, whether he is a good or bad man, whether he is in the broad or narrow way; and, in a word, whether the angel or the animal hath the better right to give him a name.

However, it is worth his while seriously to consider two things; the misery, and danger, of his condition.

That man is certainly, for the present, very unhappy, who, having a just sense of religion, a rational prospect, and with it a glorious ambition, of rising to a higher order of beings by the purification and improvement of his nature, finds himself nevertheless drawn downward by the inferior part of that nature, and so entangled in the corruption of sin, that his fears of falling into a lower and baser order of beings are fully sufficient to balance all his hopes of rising. He who hath great thoughts, and a high sense of things, must be infinitely more impatient, than men whose minds are much lower pitched, under the disgrace of a fall from such exalted views, to reasonable apprehensions of finding himself, in the end, a vile and abject beast, instead of a glorious angel.

But, while he labours under these distractions, he hath something, if he considers it, to reproach himself with, that sets him, in point of understanding, below the fool who is uniformly wicked. A life so divided between virtue and vice as his, can never refine his nature, and qualify him for glory and happiness; and yet no kind of life can be farther from pleasure and satisfaction; for, at the same time that his corrupt inclinations, and vile practices, put it out of his power to relish the angelic pleasures of contemplation, of devotion, and of doing good, his conscience, and his title to exaltation, which he knows not how to surrender, forbid his having any other than an imperfect enjoyment of sin, and force him to take up with a pitiful share of those pleasures, which the entirely wicked allows himself. Besides, his sinful pleasures are imbittered with remorse, and he feels the pangs of guilt without the comfort of reformation. Is this

a scheme for a sensible mind, or one that had ever any notion of that which is great and good, to rest in? No; it is so far from a rational scheme, that it is no scheme at all. He is a man of understanding and religion, and yet lives without a design or scheme, without any certain aim or end; but is sometimes drawn upward, and sometimes driven downward (without knowing where he shall stop in the one progress, or whether he shall persevere in the other), by quite contrary impulses, that depend not, either as to their kind or degree, on his own election. Surely the condition of such a man, so convulsed and torn by contrary principles, so anxiously struggling upward at one time, and so shamefully falling at another, so racked between hopes and fears, now aspiring to the piety and glory of angels, and now plunged in the abject appetites, the abominable pollutions, of a beast, must be very miserable.

Yet, miserable as it is, he ought keenly to consider the danger he is in of falling, even from this state of distraction, wherein, if there is a battle, there is also some hope of victory, into a course of life, that must hurry him continually downward. It is not in the nature of man to be, for any considerable time, neither better nor worse. Nor will the principles that are within him, nor the spiritual good or ill powers that act on him from without, long suffer him to remain in the same moral state. If the Spirit of God, together with a lively conscience, and a right sense of religion, have the government of his mind, they will lead him continually upward to a more pure and spiritual nature. If the devil and vice have the dominion over him, they will keep him always in motion downward, to still deeper and fouler degrees of corruption. Besides, as habit always naturally grows out of practice, it will add considerably to the speed and expedition of either progress.

It being therefore certain, that he must be always, in the main, either rising or falling; and, as he cannot but choose the former, it is his business to bring his passions and affections, as speedily as possible, either heartily to concur with, or at least humbly to submit to, his choice. In order to this, the nature of the subject we are upon, if closely considered, will lend him all the assistance (humanly speaking) his case admits of. If, on the one hand, he strongly repre-

sents to himself the glory and happiness which the angelic order enjoys, through the purity and excellence of its nature, he will find somewhat, in this representation, infinitely more powerful to engage his affections, than all the flesh and the world can tempt them with. If, on the other, he sensibly considers, not only what it is to be a beast, but what it is to fall from a rational to a brutal nature, and, for the sin of such a fall, to be degraded, even below the rank of a brute, to the disgraceful nature, and the dreadful condition of a devil, he will derive, from this consideration, wherewithal, to alarm his shame, his fear, and every other sense, that is most impatient of pain and misery, to such a pitch, as will put it past the power of any other object or consideration to make a deep impression on them.

The second state, in relation to the present subject, in which a too numerous class of men may be found, is of those, who make a uniform, though more or less speedy, progress, through vice or irreligion, to the nature of brutes.

These are the men in whom human nature is inverted; in whom the brute, which ought to serve and be directed, usurps a tyranny over the angel, whose right it is to direct, restrain, and govern; that is, in whom sense, appetite, and passion, bear the sway, while reason and conscience act only an under part, when they are suffered to act at all, and serve for no other purpose, but to countenance the folly, or scheme the wickedness, of their lives. Were not instances of this sort so common as they are, we should be more shocked with them, than with the sight of a man driven by a horse, or whipped and disciplined by a dog, and obliged to run on his errands, whenever he pleases to bark his will. This image sets the thing in a most contemptible, and, I own, in a ridiculous light; but in what other light can it be justly set?

When we are asked, What man is? we answer, He is a rational animal. If this is admitted as a right definition, will it not exclude from the class of men all those creatures, howsoever distinguished by an outward human figure, over whom reason hath so little authority, that either no ends, or ends quite contrary to those of their being, are pursued during the far greater part of their lives, and in whom mere sensual affections, gross appetites, and lawless passions, pre-

scribe at random so wild and wicked a behaviour, as nothing but infamy and misery can attend? Is he a rational creature, or a man, who never acts by reason? Or rather, is he not a brute, who, after his hunger is satisfied, eats till he surfeits; after his thirst is quenched, and his spirits cheered, drinks on till he can neither think, speak, nor stand; who, after the natural ends of commerce with the other sex are answered, follows his filthy desire, till all the powers, both of mind and body, are enfeebled to an utter unfitness for every office, nay, every pleasure, of life; who, after rising to a station high enough to make his head giddy, and too heavy for his shoulders to bear, in pursuit of his ambition, schemes or fights on for a degree of power, which he does not even propose either to use or enjoy? Who, after he hath scraped together more wealth than is sufficient for many expensive men, is still a beggar, as appears by the miserable penury in which he lives, and by the infinite anxiety wherewith he distracts and tortures himself in the pursuit of more? Or who, being possessed of more than he can possibly use, puts it to the hazard of a die, whether he shall have twice as much, or nothing? If such creatures, instead of obtaining the least shadow of ease, peace, or contentment, only plunge themselves in sickness, in confusion, in distress, in remorse, in death; shall we not rank ourselves with them, if we pronounce them men, and reasonable creatures? For my part, I think it a scandal to human nature, and highly detrimental to civil and religious society, that such brutes, merely on the strength of walking erect on two legs, and wearing a human face, should be suffered still to pass for men. What better is the spaniel, that frowns and flatters for a bit; the ape, that by his ridiculous grimaces, confounds things sacred and profane; the fox, that supports himself by fraud and deceit; the goat, that lives only on his lust; and the wolf or tiger, that oppresses and tears all he can lay his teeth on, for disguising himself in a human figure? Were all men such as these, Solomon might have truly said, as well in respect to the life, as the death of man, that 'he hath no pre-eminence above a beast.' When 'the heart,' or understanding, 'of a beast was given to Nebuchadnezzar,' he was driven from the society of men; and, though still retaining the shape of a man, was forced to herd and mess on grass with his peers

in brutality. Were God pleased, in like manner, to manifest the present set of brutes, that pass for men, 'so as that they might see,' as Solomon expresses it, 'that they themselves are beasts,' what honour would it not do to human nature! And what happiness would it not bring to the real men, who might, in that case, have leave to govern themselves, and manage their affairs, by the rules of right reason, and pure religion! On the other hand, what a detestable, what a miserable herd must these brutes, thus expelled from human society, constitute, if their abominable qualities could suffer them to live together! But till this be done, which we are sure will one day happen, as it is the just privilege, so it will be the wisdom, of every reasonable creature, to look on such monsters of their own making with contempt and detestation; for, surely, of all living creatures, they best deserve it, devils only excepted. Other brutes are where it hath pleased God to put them, and act up to the nature he hath given them; but these brutes have chosen to degrade themselves from a higher order of beings, and from pretensions to an order still more exalted and dignified; and, instead of answering either the intentions of their Maker, or the expectations of men, pursue a course of life directly contrary to both; and are become, in the mouths of rash and ignorant persons, a reproach to the works of God, and an objection to the wisdom and justice of his providence.

Of those, who thus fall from the dignity of human nature into a state of brutality, there are few or none that do it all at once. They descend to this sink of folly and vice by certain steps, so imperceptible to themselves, that they often rise in vanity, as they sink in dignity, till they become capable of even 'glorifying their shame.' It requires some length of time, and force of habit, to make so great a change in nature, as that which compels a rational soul to give up all its glorious prospects, and to sink into a lower order of beings.

The original taint of human nature is that which gives the first occasion to this fall. It is owing to this, that the appetites, the affections, the passions, that is, the brutal part of most men, comes earlier to its strength than the rational or angelic. If there happens to be any defect, or wrong bias, in the education of a man, as for instance, if he passes

any considerable share of his youth under the unhappy influence of unsound principles, or bad examples, his brutal part, having been suffered to correspond too freely and too closely with sensual allurements, soon overpowers the rational, and gives him either a worldly or voluptuous turn of thinking. In this disposition of mind, he now and then ventures on vicious practices, intemperance, lying, lewdness; and still, as conscience and shame give way, proceeds with greater boldness to more frequent and grosser acts of the kind. If his reason, roused by the immediate mischiefs of vice, or some fears of futurity, now and then remonstrates against such practices, it is easily overborne by the violence of appetite and passion in such a one, whose heart goes before his head, and hath already got the start and mastery within him. But these checks of reason, conscience, or shame, which never wrought on him with any considerable strength, giving him pain, and vice pleasure, the spiritual part of his nature grows still weaker, and the brutal stronger, till the habit of sin rivets all his vices in the very soul of him, and renders them inveterate.

In the mean time, if the influence of conscience, or regard to character, continue to give him some uneasiness, he never once considers either as an instrument of reformation, but as a clog to his pursuits; and therefore, instead of setting himself to consult with either, he only seeks a remedy against both. To cure himself of his conscience, he looks out for loose principles, and quickly finds, that all religion is priestcraft and imposition; for, as hath been already observed, his brutish heart goes foremost in all things, and forces his head to follow. By this management his very reason is debauched, and the angel within him falling, is no less brutalized than the grosser half of his composition. Regard to his character, which in him is nothing more than regard to his schemes of pleasure and interest, which cannot proceed without some character, gives him a good deal more trouble than his conscience; for whereas his conscience lies altogether at the mercy of his own discretion, his character depends as much on the opinions and tongues of others. His only relief, in this case, is to be drawn from deceit and artifice, wherewith he takes care to stock himself, as fast as he can, according to the utmost extent of that

understanding God hath given him for higher and better purposes. Here also the angel is enslaved to the brute, and he is rational only in order to be wicked. If pleasure is his turn, dressing, drinking, wenching, swallow up all his time and fortune, and lead him such a dance, through a sink of filth and pollution, as is too gross for the taste of a swine. If avarice or ambition lays hold on him, he puts himself under the tuition of the old serpent, and, by a mixture of deceit, which is no way akin to right reason, or true wisdom, and of cruelty, which hath no tincture of bravery, he does more mischief among mankind in one year, than all the wild beasts of the world during twenty.

In the last stage of a mind, thus wholly abandoned to brutality, no beast can think or act with less regard to reason, with less sense of conscience, or shame, or pity, than such a monster. He falls from so great a height, who falls from the nature of a man to that of a beast, that he cannot stop even at brutality, but is hurried still downward, till he can hardly be distinguished from his tempter; so that, from being only 'a little lower than the angels,' he is now but a very little higher than the devils.

It is now time to turn our eyes from a set of wretches, who do not only shock us with the sight of reason in ruins, as is the case when we see a madman or a fool, but, what is infinitely worse, with the mind of a brute and a devil in the mask of a man, to the refreshing view of a human creature rising, through the improvement of his angelic nature, towards a higher order of beings, till 'that which was sown in corruption, is raised in incorruption; till that which was sown in dishonour, is raised in glory; till that which was sown in weakness, is raised in power.' These are the men, who, in respect to the great change whereof the nature of man is capable, are found in the third state, namely, of such as make a more or less speedy progress, through piety and virtue, to the nature of angels.

We are told by our blessed Saviour, that, 'in the resurrection we shall be as the angels of God in heaven;' that is, holy, happy, and crowned with unspeakable glory. But, if we do not resemble them in goodness here, in this state of trial and preparation, we cannot hope to rise hereafter to a participation of their dignity. 'The angels always behold

the face of God;' but 'without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.' The men I am speaking of, having laid this to heart, do all they can, during their whole lives, 'to perfect holiness in the fear of God.' Like the angels in heaven, 'they have set the Lord always before them,' both as their master, in whose sight and presence they are to perform the task assigned them; and as their pattern, to which their whole lives, as far as human infirmity will permit, are to be conformed.

Degenerate as the times are, we here and there see a man of this sort, whom, were we to consider him in the mean of his actions, and not in his outward figure, or in his accidental slips, we should take to be an angel, rather than a man. If we compare the purity and holiness of his life with those of angels, or with the corruptions of other men, we shall perceive a much greater resemblance in him to the former than to the latter. If we consider the fervour of his devotions, we shall find him, agreeably to the image given in Scripture of God's 'ministering spirits, a flame of fire,' of fire so bright, so pure, so hallowed, and of a tendency upward to the fountain and object of love so warm and strong, as raises him, in spite of the flesh and blood that yet hang about him, to a fellowship in piety with angels and seraphim. If we consider him in the truth of all he says, in the integrity of all he does, in the zeal and activity wherewith he serves his Master, in his beneficence to all men, in his compassion for the miserable, and in his good offices even to such as have injured him in his fortune, his character, and his person, we shall have too much modesty to rank him with ourselves; we shall pronounce him a 'ministering spirit,' an angel.

It will be worth our while, who look up to him from a state, in comparison of his, so low and abject, to inquire by what steps he rose to so great a height. So far as his happy progress depended on his own endeavours, he began with a fair and close examination into the difference between good and ill principles, and their effects; between good and ill practices, and their consequences; and having, on a full conviction of his judgment, chosen the former, he put himself under the government of his angelic part, or his understanding. But, finding the brutal part, or his fleshly nature, utterly averse to such a government, he did not stay to con-

sult with flesh and blood, but had recourse immediately to watching, mortification, and prayer. By a resolute perseverance in these, the brute within him was bridled, and the angel began to gain ground. When at any time he stumbled, and fell back from his course, the remorses of a David, and the tears of a Magdalen, brought him up again to a higher and firmer station, than that from whence he fell. Thus he grappled with himself, and fought with his enemy, till the hand of God and habit gained him a complete victory, and gave him the entire command over the inferior part of his composition. From this time, he saw the world far beneath him, and its pomps, its vanities, its profits, its pleasures, sunk and diminished to a minuteness, that left them but a very small share of his esteem; while God and virtue took up all his attention, filled his imagination, and inspired him with a noble ambition of rising in the scale of being, a step nearer to the source of all perfection. In this blessed state of mind, he found, with infinite delight, all his affections and passions, not only under absolute subjection, but so spiritualized, and pointed upward, that they served only to give warmth to his devotions, and to carry his heart, with all their strength, to God.

Such is the nature of this angel in human shape; and his carriage is conformable to his nature; for being, in the first place, innocent, 'and void of offence towards God, and towards man;' and, in the next place, giving up his soul and affections to God, he divides his time between the delightful ardours of piety and prayer on the one hand, and acts of goodness and charity on the other. What he solicits God to be to him, as far as his limited ability extends, he thinks himself obliged to be to others. What he tastes from the fountain of good, whether it be in spiritual or temporal blessings, he scatters with an unsparing hand among his fellow creatures. He is the canal of God's goodness to man, which as it passes through him, enriches its banks with flowers of a heavenly hue, and fruits of a most exalted taste. He is the almoner of divine charity, and is paid his salary in blessings both from the giver and receiver. In prosperity, he is the refuge of the helpless, the protection of the oppressed, the treasurer of God, frugal in his own expenses, and faithful in the disbursements of his master. In

adversity and persecution, he is a rock too high for fear to reach him, too firm and solid for the cruelties of men, or the batteries of fortune, to shake him. Take him in what light you will, he does honour, not only to his own understanding and resolution, but to his religion and human nature. In a word, he wants nothing but death to make him an angel.

Having thus briefly considered the three different states, in respect to improvement and degeneracy, in one or other of which every man must be found, it is now our business carefully to examine which of them is our own, that we may have recourse to the resolutions and measures, which the situation we are in shall render necessary.

If any man finds himself wavering between virtue and vice, sometimes rising, in purity and goodness, towards a higher, and sometimes sinking, in corruption and sin, towards a lower nature than his own, he is no longer to trust himself to a state so dangerous and uncertain; but to consider, that he must quickly and unavoidably enter fully into the one course, or the other; to compare the widely different ends of each, and immediately fix his choice, before temptation and habit do it for him; and then to put on resolutions suitable to the progress he chooses, and to the dignity of a free and rational creature.

If he finds his heart already engaged in a progress downward to brutality, he is lost to himself, if he does not immediately use his utmost endeavour to rouse his mind to a sharp conflict with his corruptions. He should labour to bring himself back to that struggle he felt within him, between the angel and the brute, before he fell, which, as a fever does to the body, hath weakened his mind, and left his virtue a dying, so that he hath no other resource, but in the violence of his former disorder; which disorder, as it is, must be the first step to his cure. To reduce him to this, the grace of God, and all his own resolution, will be little enough. But, how he may awaken his stupid mind to a proper resolution, unless by considering, that the course he is in will soon confirm him a brute and a devil, is more than I can tell.

But, in case he finds reason to think he is rising, through piety and purity of heart, towards the angelic nature, he stands in little need of our advice. The joy and exultation

he feels in such a thought, must, to an understanding so well enlightened, and to a heart so happily turned as his, be sufficient to give him all possible steadiness and alacrity in such a progress.

On the whole, a thinking mind cannot possibly entertain a more true or interesting reflection than this, that, if he exercises himself in religious meditations, and virtuous actions, he shall thereby refine, improve, and adorn, his nature, till he finds himself crowned with the glory of a conqueror, and shining in the society of angels; but that if, on the contrary, he gives himself up to sensual pleasures, or to a low and worldly course of life, he must degenerate to a contemptible slave, an abject brute, an infernal devil. To what a glorious height may we rise! To what a dreadful depth may we fall! Where is our ambition? Why does it, how can it, suffer us to waste a thought on any other grandeur? Is it leading us in pursuit of worldly thrones, and worldly sceptres? Despicable objects! Senseless pursuit! What is a king, an emperor, to an angel? Where is our prudence, our caution? Why do they not alarm us with the danger of that only fall, which can make us little in the eyes of God, and scandalous in those of all his creatures? Are they employed in guarding us against the danger of falling into poverty, or of sinking from that wretched inch of worldly distinction to which we are raised? What is this to the danger of tumbling from the dignity of a rational, to the baseness of a brutal, nature? Does reason deserve the name, if it cannot call them up from apprehensions so low and childish, to an alarm so loud and terrible? Surely if reason cannot do this, it can do nothing. But I forget that I am talking to people who call themselves Christians, that is, to people who have not only reason, but faith, to assist them on this occasion. How grossly do they impose on themselves in thinking they have either, if all they have for both, cannot teach them how to distinguish between the value of a pin, and that of a crown, or between things that bear infinitely less proportion? I am at a loss, whether I should charge mankind with a want of common sense, so wildly do they wander from what they seem to admire; or with a want of ambition, so low, so pitiful, are their pursuits.

Indeed it is natural for all men to aspire, and extremely

mortifying to be degraded, not only in station, office, or honour, but more especially in being and nature. With what joy would it transport a man to be transformed, as in a moment, into an angel! How would it shock him, suddenly to change the outward shape of a man for that of a brute! And why should he not as strongly desire the former, and as deeply abhor the latter change, supposing either gradual? Or is a change of shape only so affecting? Is not so glorious a rise, so miserable a fall of mind, of nature, infinitely more interesting? The desire of happiness is the strongest of all our desires, or rather our only desire. The dread or detestation of misery, is either the strongest, or the only detestation we have. Again, there is no point, whereof our understandings are more fully convinced, than that the improvement of our nature is, in proportion, necessarily attended with happiness; and its depravity, in proportion likewise, with our misery. How comes it then to pass, that a rational being should ever act against his highest conviction, his strongest desire, his deepest detestation? The truth is, he never does, he never can; and therefore in order, at least, to a course of such actions, must be destitute of reason. With this man it is folly, gross and stupid as his own, to spend the time in arguing; but, to such as have still some use of their understandings, what hath been said on this important subject, may do some good.

God, in his infinite goodness, grant it may, for the sake of Christ Jesus our Saviour; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now, and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXXIII.

WHO ARE IDOLATERS.

St. Matt. iv. 10.

Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

We are apt to be struck with horror and astonishment, when we find, in profane history as well as Scripture, that so many nations of the world worshipped a multitude of gods; that some paid divine honours to men, often to the worst of men; that others took beasts, and creeping things, and even plants, for gods; and that they sacrificed to them, feared them, put their trust in them, fought, and frequently died for them. We are amazed, that reasonable creatures should be so excessively stupid. We cannot tell how to account for it, that he, who was ingenious enough to make a most admirable image of a man, should have so little sense, as to take that image, which he himself had made out of a piece of timber, a mass of metal, or a rude stone, for a god, and fall down to worship it. We are still more surprised, that the greatest historians should write, and the wisest philosophers reason, and the most exalted poets sing, of such manufactures, as real gods.

The most ignorant among us entertains a settled contempt for folly so gross and blind; and yet the wisest either does not see, nor is not greatly offended at, the same stupid impiety in himself and others, who pass for Christians. The artful enemy of mankind, being no longer able to seduce us from the true God, by gods of wood and stone, hath nevertheless found means to keep up, even among Christians, the worship of those other idols, riches, pleasure, power, &c. by which he enslaved the heathen world as miserably, as by his Jupiters, his Baals, his Astaroths; though the worship of the former is as severely forbidden in holy Scripture.

When we speak as Christians, what is it we mean by God? Is it not that Being, on whom we absolutely depend; whom we regard as the best, the most excellent, the most

powerful of all beings; that Being, whom to enjoy is the greatest happiness, and whom to be separated from, is the greatest misery; that Being, whom all our thoughts, our hopes, and fears, are employed about; whom we love and trust to above all things; whom all our anxieties and labours are laid out for; and for whom we are willing, on all occasions, to hazard, and, on many, to sacrifice our lives?

A man may profess in words what he will, and call his God by what name he pleases; but we see by facts, a surer testimony than words, that whatsoever being any man regards in this manner, is really and truly his god; for he sets it highest in his heart, he presents it with the first-fruits of his affections, he offers it his richest sacrifices.

Christ sums all our duty to God in the love of him. When we do not love God, we fail of this duty entirely. When we love and admire any thing else more than him, we advance an inferior being above him in our hearts; and, if this inferior being should be his enemy, as the pomps of the world, or the lusts of the flesh, we then declare open war with him; we have then another master, another leader, another dependence, another love; nay, an opposite god; for that which is first and highest with us, is our god.

He who does not love God, does he not deny his perfection, his beauty, his excellence, and his goodness? He who does not trust in God, does he not deny his truth, and doubt his promises? He who does not fear God, does he not deny, or at least disbelieve, his power and justice? He who does not love, fear, and depend, on God, is an Atheist. But he who loves, fears, or depends, on any thing more than him, is an idolater in the sight of God; for the mere outward shew and ceremony of bending the knee to him, and calling him his God, will be infinitely farther from passing for real worship on the Searcher of hearts, than such complimental respects would, for real esteem, on men, who see little farther than the outsides of things.

One would be apt, at first hearing of the commandment, forbidding us to have any other, but the true God; and of this in my text, charging us to worship and serve him only; to imagine them unnecessary in this age and country, where the worship of the one true God is so universally professed, and that of other gods so utterly disowned. But

upon more attentively comparing the commandment with the general practice, we find, it is still absolutely necessary to us. Love and reverence must ever be paid, in the highest degree, to that which we conceive to be most excellent, and to have the greatest power to help us, and make us happy. Now, although in reasoning and speculation, we always give the preference of excellence and power to God, yet in practice we are too often found to do otherwise; for our deceitful hearts impose on us, and draw away our love and reverence to other things. We have many objects of our love and regard, which we think more of, which we labour more about, which we put more trust in, than in the God of heaven. All true service of God is comprehended in this, that we give our whole hearts to God, that we love him above all things, that we trust in him before all things, that in short, we 'love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and with all our soul, and with all our mind;' and all idolatry in this, that we place our greatest affection, and repose our highest trust, in any thing else.

It is equally offensive to God, and fatal to ourselves, thus to dispossess God of our hearts, and set up any of his creatures in his place. What is it to God, whether that which we prefer before him, is the sun, the soul of a departed conqueror, or some of those worldly enjoyments, which he hath assigned to man as his portion, as his servant, not as his master and God, in this life? God is not more jealous of one object than another, when it presumes to rival, or stand before him, in our affections. If he is deprived of his natural and eternal right to reign over our hearts, it matters not what that is, for the sake of which we offer him so provoking an affront, so grievous an injury. And it is of the same unhappy and fatal consequence to us; for be it what it will, it equally serves to raise the jealousy and anger of Almighty God against us; to cut us off from the fountain of all good; to turn away our hearts from the love and enjoyment of that object, in comparison of which, all other objects are foul and vile, are little and contemptible, to the last degree; and, when set up in opposition to him, become the occasion of infinite disappointment, and of irretrievable misery to us.

This reasoning, so clear and convincing in itself, is farther confirmed to us by the language of holy Scripture.

Covetousness is there expressly called idolatry; and the belly, or gluttony, is also said to be the god of some. Now, we are not to think that mammon and the belly only can give the name of idolaters to their worshippers. Any other creature, too fondly desired, or too earnestly pursued, can do the same, and for the very same reason; that is, can estrange the heart from God, and carry it off to things that have from themselves no right to our regard; because, whatever aptness they may have to benefit or hurt us, they receive it from God alone. They are but our fellow-creatures at best, and most of them put in subjection to us. How then can we think of enslaving ourselves to them? They are but the instruments of Providence. The light of the sun, for instance, is not more the gift of God, than riches, power, or any other worldly possession. The good we receive from the one is wholly the gift of God, as well as that which we derive from the other. God can, if he pleases, cause them to become the instruments of evil; and no doubt those turn them into the occasions of their own eternal ruin, who suffer their affections to rest in them, and do not carry forward their gratitude and love to God, who made and bestows them on us. God manifests his love to us through them; and shall we centre all our love in his benefits, and forget our benefactor? Ought we not rather to make those effects of God's goodness to us the causes and incitements of our gratitude to him? It is our greatest unhappiness, that in these very cords of love, with which God intends to draw up our hearts to him, we should so entangle ourselves, as to become incapable of all motion and tendency towards him.

There is but one supreme Being, 'who is God over all,' who hath power in himself to make, and to destroy, to raise up and to throw down, to bring good or evil on mankind. It is evident therefore, that there is but that one Being, whom every rational creature ought to love, reverence, and confide in, with all his heart, and with all his soul; that is, whom he ought to worship and serve as God.

Shall a Christian now, who says he is sensible of all this, despise the Pagan for praying to a mortal man, who is dead and cannot help; to a carved image, that cannot hear him; or to a brute, which God and nature have put in subjection to him; yet place his greatest confidence, his highest esteem,

his warmest affection, on wealth, honour, power, or pleasure? Are not these idols of the pretended Christian as vain in themselves, and as odious in the sight of God, as those of the Pagan? Or is the service of them the more tolerable for its being paid by one who professes the worship and service of the true God only? If our empty professions can do any thing, it is only to make the idolatrous alienation of our hearts the more provoking. To reduce our worship to mere words and compliments, contradicted by all our actions, is but to mock and banter the object of that pretended worship. Men of common sense, as they easily see through, so they always resent with the keenest indignation, a conduct so disingenuous, when offered to themselves. Now, if such a practice will not pass on men, who see only the outsides of things, how shall it pass on the awful Searcher of hearts? He who gives his tongue to God, and his heart to the things of this world, is both a hypocrite and an idolater. That many among us do nevertheless look on these as the supreme good, as the most necessary things, the most amiable, and the most capable of making them happy, and therefore worship them as their gods, is evident;

First, From the great anxiety of their hearts about them; which makes it plain that they are uppermost in all their thoughts. For these they deprive themselves of peace and contentment; of peace with God, with man, and with their own consciences; and of contentment in such circumstances, as might afford them all the real comforts of life. For these they are day and night on the rack of a thousand vehement desires, and contrary passions, and impracticable or dangerous schemes. If their deities do but smile on them, how are they transported! If they frown, how are they dejected and overwhelmed! This excessive anxiety, this unintermitting love, this preference of what they pursue to every thing else, to their ease, and safety, and real happiness, shews but too plainly what is their god.

Secondly, Their unwearied labours after the possessions, or honours, or pleasures of the world, shew more evidently, than even their transports of joy and sorrow, which are discoverable only by their outward effects, where their worship is fixed. No man labours for what he neither loves nor esteems. Every one labours most for that which he sets the

highest regard on. It follows, therefore, that when we see a man neglect all other concerns, to set forward and accomplish one particular design; when we see it takes up all his thoughts, is perpetually in his mouth, exercises not only his brain, but his feet, his hands, his whole body, in such excessive labours by night, and by day, over hills and dales, through land and sea, as one would think it almost impossible for human nature to undergo, we may conclude he thinks it the most excellent of all things, the supreme good.

But, thirdly, The dangers he faces, for that which he is in pursuit of, shew, to demonstration, what is his god. He will stand the mark of all the musquetry and cannon of a great army, for ten hours, to recommend himself to the favour of his deity. He will place himself on a plank, and let the winds and waves whirl him about, like a straw, while death presents itself to his astonished heart in the most hideous forms; he will roast himself to a cinder in the furnace of a burning climate, and afterward freeze to an icicle in a cold one, to get a little nearer to the object of all his wishes. After seeing him do all this, we need not ask him what is his god.

And if we may judge of the zeal and devotion, wherewith he worships, by the greatness and expense of the sacrifices he offers, he is, beyond all question, the most furious zealot for his god, that can be conceived. Other bigots, along with some cool prayers, offer a ram, a goat, a bullock, or it may be a hundred bullocks at once. But this is nothing: the worshipper I am speaking of offers up all the real comforts of life, and throws in his honour, and his conscience, if those be any thing, to make his sacrifice the more perfect. Another man perhaps offers up his child, his only and beloved son, the comfort of his life, and the prop of his old age; but this is only a trifle: our devotee sacrifices himself, sacrifices his life, and his soul to his god; and burns himself, on a fiercer fire than ever was kindled to Moloch; I mean that fire, which is fed in this life with flaming lust and raging passions, and turns in the next to inextinguishable brimstone.

And do these deities deserve such prodigious services and sacrifices?

To begin with riches: Are they the supreme good? Can they save us from sickness or death? Can they deliver us

from eternal misery? Or can they purchase us the joys and glories of heaven? If they cannot, the worldling pays too dearly for them. Is he sure, after all his pains, to obtain them, that he shall succeed? Or, if he is sure of this, is he certain they will stay with him? May they not 'make themselves wings and fly away?' Or, if they do stay, will they defend him from all dangers, and make him happy? No; they are the very 'root of all evil.' They will swell him with pride. They will drown him in luxury. They will afflict him with sickness, and hasten his death. They will lead him out of the narrow path, into the broad way of this world. They are hard to be acquired, harder still to be kept, and those who do keep them, are exposed to envy, and fraud, and robbery; they are exposed to what is worse, their own eternal anxiety and fears. Nay, it often happens, that when there is no thief to pillage them, they by their own penury effectually plunder themselves; when there is no invader to murder them for what they possess, they sometimes turn their passion into distraction, lay violent hands on themselves, and die martys at last to their god.

As to honour or praise, which is the idol of so many weak and empty people, what is it? It is compounded of the vanity, with which the self-conceited heart feeds itself, and of the praises of others. Is the being well spoken of such a mighty matter? Does it much concern us what either the fool thinks, or the flatterer says, of us? No: but in order to mend the compliment paid us, we are apt to think him neither fool, nor knave, who makes it. But let him be what he will, can the opinion of another give us a better opinion of ourselves, than we had before? Or are we so very modest as to need it? Can others discover those beauties and excellencies in us, which sharp-sighted vanity cannot see? Or can the mistaken esteem, or the false applause of the world, refute to us the inward reproaches of our own hearts and consciences? Does our happiness subsist on the mere breath of the crowd? The truth is, no one was ever very desirous of praise, who had worth enough to deserve it.

He who places his joy in admiring himself; who having no other, turns his own flatterer, does but set up an idol of himself, and not his true self, for his god. Those Pagans,

who worshipped the image of a hero, or public benefactor, had more to say for their religion, than this idolater, who adores, we may venture to say, one of the silliest and most worthless animals in the creation, as ridiculous and nauseous to every body else, as the deified monkies and garlick of the Egyptians.

Honour is but an airy and notional divinity. Is power more real and solid? Power is, for the most part, desired chiefly for the sake of honour; and when it is, is esteemed as much inferior to it, as the means are to the end. Power is the most difficult of all acquisitions, and the most troublesome of all possessions. There is generally no struggling up to it in time of peace, without such base means, and servile arts, as it is surprising the proud, and the ambitious, can ever prevail on themselves to stoop to. And what is it they struggle for? Why, to stand on a pinnacle exposed to the same arts incessantly employed to bring them down. There is no arriving at power by the sword, without undergoing toils, and being exposed to dangers, which no man in his senses could think of encountering for the sake of any thing, less than God and heaven. The great ones laugh at the little man, who, with high ambition, aspires to the dignity of a sub-sheriff's rod, or a constable's staff; yet their passion and his are the same, and the end they aim at no way different. He is as vain of his place, and better pleased with it, than Alexander the Great with his vast dominion. And now we have mentioned this most powerful prince, he will serve, better than any other, to exemplify the vanity of ambition and worldly dominion in all men; for none can hope to go higher than he did; none indeed, but a madman, can expect to rise to any thing like the power and grandeur he arrived at. What countries did Alexander conquer? How long did he reign? What became of him and his power? He conquered but a small spot on a little ball of earth; and, when he was very young, the juice of a few grapes, trod but a little before by the feet of a poor labourer, went boldly up to him, in the midst of all his guards, his armies, his power; dragged him from his throne, and threw him into a ditch. Why did not his god, whom he had sacrificed so many human victims to, and for whom he had so often exposed himself, deliver him from this contemptible

enemy? Power could not make good, what it had so long promised him; all it could gather, to give him contentment from so many glorious victories, was just so much wine as was sufficient to deliver him from the load his successful ambition had laid upon him. Wherein then does the grandeur of this world consist? It is much the same as that of the most considerable bee in a hive, or the strongest reptile in a bed of ants. It is but a poor ambition, that hath no bounds. That of Alexander and Cæsar had none. How did they laugh at the low-spirited aims of such as aspired to some office under them, perhaps to be the servant of their servants, in a succession of many degrees, down to the meanest officer in their courts or armies! In what a contemptible light does all subordinate ambition appear, when that of the greatest conquerors that ever lived, shews itself to be so very low, so very little, in the eye of sound reason.

As to pleasure, he who makes that his god, should have, one would think, a very indulgent deity of it. The case is however quite otherwise. There is not a severer, nor a more dreadful devil to serve, in all the regions of darkness. The enjoyments, with which he tempts silly people into his service, are trifling to the last degree, and continue but for a moment? for human nature is, by its wise Author, greatly stinted and bounded on the side of sensual pleasure. And what follows these momentary dreams of delight? Why, sudden shame, grievous disappointment, intolerable remorse, painful sickness, shocking death. No sort of slave hath so bad a time of it, or suffers so much as the man of pleasure. The sow, and he, may be almost said to mess on the same dish, which, when they have finished, they roll themselves on a dunghill, think of nothing above it, and lose themselves in filth and stupidity, till they are roused 'to the slaughter; and the knife,' or the dart, 'strikes through the liver.'

Are these thy gods, O Christian? O vain, pretended Christian? These! which you renounced, when you took on you the profession of a Christian! But it now appears, your baptismal covenant is forgot and neglected, as an empty ceremony. The word of God too is as little set by, where these things are so often, and in so strong terms, represented as the enemies of God and your soul, as the springs of all evil, as the snares of the devil, as 'vanity and

vexation of spirit.' Confess the truth; does not your experience fully prove the same thing to you? Have you been yet able to raise yourself to such a fortune, to such honours, power, or pleasures, as can satisfy you, or pay you for the labour, and vexation, they cost you? Or, if you have, how long, think you, will you be able to continue in the enjoyment of them? A few years must infallibly tear you from them. 'Thou fool, perhaps this night thy soul shall be required of thee.' Can these things defend you against the changes of fortune, against unhappy accidents, against the stings of conscience, or sickness, or death? Are you sure they can 'deliver you out of the hands of the living God,' from whom you have revolted, to serve these vanities? But you will say, I know all this, and do neither rest in the riches, or pomps, or pleasures, of the world; I do not worship them, nor set them above God in my affections; but however find it necessary, while I am here, to make some provision for a competent and decent subsistence. Do not deceive yourselves, nor mock God. Since you give incomparably more of your thoughts and labours to the world than to God, it is too evident, that the world is uppermost in your heart. Do you labour whole days, do you rise up early, and late take rest, for God, as you do for the bread of affliction? Do you ever spend a whole week in settling a spiritual account? Do you make laborious journeys, do you take long voyages, do you fight dangerous battles, for God? Recollect how often you, who have endured with patience the keenest severity of the weather, and faced outrageous storms in the pursuit of worldly things, have been kept back from the worship of God by a cold day or a slight shower, and you will then perceive, whether it is God or the world that holds the first place in your heart. Did you give to God and religion the tenth part of that care and anxiety, which you lavish on the world, you would stand with the foremost of the saints in God's service; the exercise of private devotion would not seem so irksome to you, as it does; nor would it be so hard a matter to draw you to God's house, or table; you would need no compulsion to bring you in.

As to that which you call by the name of competency and decency, words big with deceit, ought it not to have some bounds? And are you not yet sensible you have set

no bounds to your desire of riches, to your thirst of honour and power, to your appetite of pleasures? Do you not still go on, desiring more, and aiming at greater matters? Or do you hope still to persevere, labouring with so great anxiety to secure a greater interest in worldly things, and at the same time to be acceptable to God? Vain imagination! 'You cannot serve God and mammon.' The moment you cleave to the latter, that moment you cut yourself off from God, who places too high an esteem upon your affections to endure to be rivalled in them, especially by so infamous and odious a rival. Think not, because the love you bestow on, and the confidence you repose in, these enemies to God, are not called idolatry by the world, which never gives the right names to its own crimes, that they are therefore the less properly and truly idolatrous. I have given, I think, sufficient reasons to prove, that they really are; but what at least ought to convince you, is, that God, who cannot lie, hath in his word called them by that name.

This, I know, is a subject, on which you do not care for thinking closely, and therefore have formed but confused and unaffecting notions about it. But consider, that God is not a man that he should be deceived; and surely no sensible man, who had a right to your services or friendship, would be satisfied with a thousand professions, if he saw by your actions, that you had little or no regard for him. Now, God is wiser than man, and sees into your heart; and, as he hath the double right of a Maker and a Saviour to all the honour you can do him, and all the services you can pay him, you may take it for granted, that a cold or outward shew of worship will be far from satisfying him, especially when he sees you joining yourself to his enemies, and putting your chief trust in them. Consider with yourself, how odious in the sight of God these objects are, that make you so inattentive to his word, so deaf to the advice of his ministers, so forgetful of all his tender mercies, and alarming judgments. Reflect how often these rivals of God have withheld you from his house and table, those outward signs, by which you hope to shew you are his worshippers; and how often, when you are persuaded, or compelled to come in, they attend you to the place of worship, engage your thoughts even there, and intercept that application of the heart, in

which consists the very nature and being of adoration, and turn it downward from God to those vanities, which, as they engrossed your hearts on other occasions, cannot be kept at a distance on this.

The profits, and honours, and pleasures of this world, are but the inferior deities, through which the god of this world maintains his correspondence with your imagination, your mistaken notions, and lusts; and, by means of that deceitful intercourse, seduces you to the dishonourable worship and service of himself. When you consider, that he is a fallen angel, an enemy to God and your soul, shocking in his person and nature, and infinitely mischievous in his designs, you utterly abhor the least thought of worshipping him, or entering into any league or combination with him. It is for this reason, that he does not appear, and openly solicit your devotion; but keeps behind the curtain, and plays such engines on you, as are less apt to excite your suspicion or aversion. It is through these that he establishes his power over you; and it was by these, that, with infinite impudence, he attempted to seduce the human nature of Christ himself. 'He shewed him all the kingdoms of the earth and said unto him, All these things will I give unto thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me;' but he was answered by infinite wisdom, in the words of my text; 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.'

When he sets forward any of these tempting objects to ensnare us, let us consider, that it is only his image; that he lurks within it, and gives it by far the greater part of its bewitching allurements; kindles up the beauty of the lewd woman; teaches the wine to move itself aright in the glass, and exalts its spirits; gives the high seasoning of the luxurious dish, the proud splendour to the gay clothes, the tempting brightness to the gold, the pomp and grandeur to worldly power. These things have, in themselves, but feeble attractions for rational souls, before whose eyes religion hath placed the glories of heaven, and who, if they examine the best things this world can promise them, with but a small degree of care and fairness, can discover that they are all only outward shew, all vanity and vexation, the furniture only of an inn, where we cannot stay; the ornaments of

a country, through which we are forced, by an unhappy necessity of nature, to ride post. How comes it then that they find means to draw after them the hearts of almost all mankind? There is, there must be, some diabolical delusion at the bottom. Since nature does not fit them for so great an influence over us, and since reason and religion do sufficiently teach us the nature of things about us, as far as we are concerned to know them, these things, which work upon us, beyond the force of their own natural powers, and contrary to the dictates of our reason, lead us, as it were, with our eyes open, to our eternal ruin, must borrow the power by which they tyrannize over us from 'the god of this world, who hath blinded the eyes of them who believe not,' and greatly dimmed the sight of many, who do.

It would be happy for us if we could, while some part of life is yet left us, and a return to God would not be altogether unacceptable, open our eyes, and see through the painted ruin, the gilded destruction, into which we are betrayed. If we do it not now, when life is near a close, ere death has lifted the last fatal blow, we shall then too late perceive how miserably we have been imposed on, how foolishly we have laboured for the wind. Then we shall be forced to cry out, 'Vanity of vanities! all is vanity! What profit hath a man of all his labour, which he taketh under the sun? What hath pride profited us? Or what good hath riches, with our vaunting, brought us?' All these things, which seemed so substantial, are 'passing away like a shadow, and as a post that hasteth by; like a ship that leaves no trace of its keel in the waves. Our hope is like dust that is blown away by the wind; like a thin froth, that is driven away with a storm; like as the smoke, which is dispersed here and there with a tempest, and passeth away like the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day. Surely we have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit. We have made unto ourselves gods, and they were no gods. Alas! that which we loved hath brought misery upon us, and that which we trusted in hath betrayed us.'

Let us, to conclude, turn from these vanities, in which we sometime walked, and whereof we ought now, in the light of the gospel, to be ashamed; and let us seek the true and only God. He is the fountain of all being, the absolute

ruler of all nature; to him therefore should all thinking beings turn their whole attention, and, fixing all their love and reverence on him, as on the centre of charity, as on the dispenser of happiness, and the source of glory, should make him the first object of all their affections, the first mover of all their thoughts, the end of all their designs, the utmost aim of all their wishes, the perfection and consummation of all their enjoyments. 'He is great, he is God alone. He only is to be feared, and what is there that we should desire in comparison of him?' What is there fit to come between God and the heart of man? Is any thing so beautiful, so excellent, so glorious, as he? Hath any other being done so much to engage our love as he? Can we hope for so kind a friend, for so powerful a protector, in any thing, as in him? Can the enjoyment of all his creatures raise our souls to pleasures so exquisite, to delights so lasting, as the enjoyment of God? What is earth to heaven, or heaven itself to God? Shall then the riches, the honours, the pleasures, of this world, 'shall death or life, shall angels, or principalities, or powers, or things present, or things to come, or height, or depth, or any other creature, be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?

No: Let us therefore no longer give the honour of God to his enemies, to mere imaginary hopes, and vain desires, of that which is either impossible to be obtained, or, if obtained, would make us miserable; and 'let us ascribe unto the Lord the honour due unto his name; let us bring presents, and come into his courts.' But what present shall we bring to him, who made and possesses all things? The present of a heart entirely his; a heart, not shamefully divided between him and the world, but emptied of all worldly vanities, and filled with God.

But, O good God, as the soul of man, clogged with a load of flesh and blood, is unable to climb to thee, stretch out thy almighty hand, and draw us upward; purify our hearts, that they may become acceptable temples for thy Holy Spirit; then enter thou, and make us wholly thine for ever; through the merits and mediation of Christ Jesus our Saviour; to whom with thee, and the ever blessed Spirit, be all honour and glory, all worship and dignity, all might, majesty, and dominion, in earth, as in heaven, now, and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXXIV.

SPIRITUAL LIGHT AND DARKNESS.

ROM. XIII. 11.

Now it is high time to awake out of sleep.

MAN comes into the world totally ignorant of all things, and afterward acquires knowledge, fancied or real, imperfect or useful, according to his capacity, his application, and his opportunities.

As to the knowledge of religion, and of morality, which depends absolutely on religion, the same is true of both. We know the principles of either, only so far as we have had the benefit of good instructions, and according to the talents and diligence we have brought with us to the inquiry. Hence it hath come to pass, that many nations, for want of proper teachers, have continued for a long succession of ages altogether ignorant of true religion, and that even in those countries, where the people have been best provided with instructors, a very few, through mere incapacity, have lived and died in a great measure ignorant of it; while an infinitely greater number, who had natural talents sufficient for the purpose, having turned them another way, passed their days in almost as gross ignorance of this most excellent kind of knowledge, as they could have done, had they been totally destitute of teachers.

The wisest heathen nations knew little or nothing of themselves, whence they came, or to what end they were destined. Whether they had any being before this life, or were to have any after it, they either did not inquire, or could by no means determine. They seemed to rise like the brutes, out of time and matter; and having little or no prospect of a future being, they lived a mere animal life, and were led by sin, like oxen, to the universal slaughter made by death.

Their deepest reasoners could never agree about the chief

end or happiness of man, and therefore could never fix upon the means to attain it. They disputed much about morality and virtue, but could never clearly determine, what they were; and, what was worse, those of them who thought the best on these points, could by no means, find out a sufficient obligation to enforce the performance of what they took to be moral duties.

Being thus ignorant of themselves, it is not to be wondered at, that they should have known still less of God; some obscure traditions, concerning a divine nature, had been handed down to them, they knew not how, which served them to no better purpose, than to put them upon worshipping, sometimes by human sacrifices, their departed benefactors or conquerors, who were often the worst of men. To these they added gods of wood and stone; nay, and while some nations were eating onions and garlick, others were transplanting them from their gardens to heaven, and cultivating them with divine honours.

This ignorance of the Gentile world, which in holy Scripture is represented to us by the strong similitude of night and darkness, was but in part removed from the Jews by the Mosaic dispensation; which, being clouded with ceremonies, and overshadowed with types and figures, sent forth a glimmering and feeble kind of rays. These served but as a twilight to a brighter revelation by the gospel, which, in Scripture, is beautifully figured by the names of light and day; for ignorance and true knowledge are to the mind, what darkness and light are to the body.

This is the night which, St. Paul says, 'is far spent;' and that is the day, which, he tells us, 'is at hand.' From hence he draws a fine conclusion; 'let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light;' let us walk honestly, as in the day.

For, by the light of the gospel, we can now clearly see that there is but one God, infinite in wisdom, power, and justice, infinite in mercy and goodness, who created and governs all things, who made us for his free and happy service, and who, when we fell into corruption and sin, sent his Son into the world, to retrieve us from both. By the same light we see how it is this great Master expects to be served; how it is we are to demean ourselves, one towards another;

what it is we may hope for, if we obey his laws ; and what we are to fear, if we transgress them. We are now no longer in the dark about the original from whence we sprung, nor the end for which we were intended. Our greatest good and evil are now set clearly before us, with a full account of the means, by which the one is to be avoided, and the other obtained. We can now have a sufficient knowledge of ourselves, and can examine our being, from the beginning, till we pursue it beyond the grave, till we see it placed before the judgment-seat of God, and either banished from his presence, into eternal night and misery, or exalted to endless light and glory. This important prospect opens to us another, which the light of nature could never have discovered. As man, left to himself, sees nothing but the things about him in this present life, so he cannot suppose there is any thing else of the least consequence to him. But as soon as his eyes, by Christian faith, are carried forward to the much greater things of eternity, in which he is so deeply concerned, he looks upon the things of this world in quite another light. They cannot bear the comparison. They sink into nothing, and are lost to his attention. Distresses and riches, pains and pleasures, disappointments and honours, jails and thrones, dwindle into trifles, when hell and heaven are in view.

This is that light which the children of light are ever ready to receive, with the greatest affection and joy. Now the children of light are those who diligently read the word of God, who make it the subject of their meditations by day and night, who, when they find it, as often they do, above their comprehension, repair to God's house and his ministers, to hear it explained ; who listen when they are there, with attention; who labour to remember and lay to heart what they hear ; and afterward, in conversation with one another, take frequent occasion to revive the consideration of what they have been taught.

This also is that light, from which the children of darkness fly away with fear and abhorrence. And the children of darkness are those, whose consciences cannot bear the picture of themselves, which the light of Christianity holds before their eyes; whose faith affords them no views, but of eternal misery ; who, as they delight only in the works of

darkness, 'hate this light, because it reproves their evil deeds;' and therefore the word of God is a stranger both to their eyes at home, and their ears in this place. Hence it comes, that we so often speak here almost to empty walls, that what we say is so little minded by those, whom the accidental goodness of the day, or a want of something else to do, suffers to saunter hither; and that, when we endeavour to carry the word of God to them, who so seldom think it worth their while to come to it, we find them and their families shocked and disobliged, at the first glimpse of its light which we discover to them.

As this sort of people make a dreadful majority at present, we may say of this light, as St. John did, at its first appearance, 'that it is a light which shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.'

But my business at present being only to speak to those who will hear, who have already opened their eyes, and it is to be hoped, their hearts too, to the light of the gospel, let me call upon such persons, in the bowels of charity, to consider, that, as they see this glorious light, shining both within them and about them, 'it is now high time,' at least for them, 'to awake out of sleep.' In respect to them, 'the night is not only far spent' but entirely past; 'the day is not only at hand,' but fully risen, or far advanced. Let them reflect that those 'who know their Master's will, and do it not,' must expect to be 'punished with many stripes;' and that, now they 'have received the light, they ought to walk worthy of that light,' taking all possible care for the time to come, to avoid those works of darkness, which they find condemned by the light of Scripture, and particularly by the apostle, in the passage immediately following my text.

And first; as to walking worthy of this light, the apostle bids us 'walk honestly,' or rather, as it is in the original, 'decently, and laudably, as in the day.' In order to this, we are exhorted by him 'to put on the armour of light;' for it is now day, and we are to enter upon action. As we are immediately to take the field against the enemies of our souls, it is necessary we should be defended by the armour of piety and virtue, and girded with the weapons of our warfare; which St. Paul elsewhere, pursuing the same allegory, calls 'the breast-plate of faith and love, and the helmet and hope

of salvation.' 'Ye, brethren,' says the apostle, 'are not in darkness. Ye are the children of light, and the children of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night, and they that be drunken, are drunken in the night.'

Being thus prepared, we are called upon to adorn the Christian profession, by a life of true holiness; that others, admiring in us the beautiful and blessed fruits of our religious principles, may be won to an earnest desire of cultivating the like in themselves; which will have a much more powerful effect in convincing them of the truth and excellence of Christianity, than ten thousand arguments and demonstrations in its favour. He who leads the best life, is the best disputant for his religion; for 'it is not with enticing words of man's wisdom,' that this cause of God is to be supported, 'but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power.' This spirit and power, which were demonstrated in the days of the apostles by inspiration, by speaking languages which they never learned, by healing of sicknesses, and raising the dead, may still be proved by the miracle of a good life in every true Christian. Is any man really a Christian? Hath he received the light of the gospel? 'Let his light then so shine forth before men, that they may see his good works, and glorify his Father which is in heaven.' How can the conscience of him, whose soul and heart are placed in the midst of so clear and glorious light, give way to thoughts, or enter upon actions, severely 'reproved by that light?' Does he not see his way? Why then does he go astray? Is it not day? Why then does he stumble almost at every step? Why does he fall into the grossest acts of sin? And dash all his hope of salvation to pieces?

It is certainly true, that he who is really a Christian, may, through the extreme infirmity of his nature, often fall into sins, and sometimes into the grosser acts of sin; but he can never rest in a uniform course of sin, till he hath stripped himself of his Christian principles; nor can he rise to a steady and uninterrupted life of virtue, till he hath mortified and subdued the corruptions of his nature. The Spirit warreth against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit, till one of those adversaries hath obtained an absolute con-

quest over the other; after which the whole man becomes either the servant of God, or the slave of the devil.

In some minds this battle is fought with infinite violence; for, on the one side, corruption and sin are deeply rooted, while the adversary of the soul is intrenched amidst inveterate habits, and almost irresistible temptations; and, on the other, the arm of God is almighty. Hence it is, that, as in a fire, for some time after a great addition of new fuel, the signs of an outrageous struggle between the contending principles are discovered; but when God hath obtained the victory, then all is kindly heat, and glorious light. Then it is that God, and his holy religion, are glorified, that the angels above find the very joys of heaven enlarged, and that men here below, being guided by the light, and warmed at the fire, of this converted sinner, are, as it were, carried forward with new strength and resolution, up the steep path of true holiness.

Let us not, in the name of God, lose the benefit of the blessed light, which he hath afforded us. As it discovers to us every step of the road, from thence to his glorious palace, let us not be discouraged at the thorns and briers that beset the entrance; for we may plainly see that, a little farther up, those briers are turned to vines, those thorns change their prickles for roses; and while the patience of the happy travellers is converted into joy, their garments begin to whiten, their faces to shine with amazing brightness, and now they are lost to our sight in glory, 'which the eye is not able to behold, nor the ear to hear, nor the heart to conceive.' He that hath eyes to see, cannot, amidst so much light, fail to choose a road that leads so directly to God, for therein only he can 'walk, as in the day.'

But as there are many new lights, and false lights, set up in the world, it will not be amiss to point out to the ignorant the distinguishing characters of the true light.

Whatsoever discovers to us the foulness and heinousness of our sins, and severely reproves them, is true light; for 'whatsoever maketh manifest is light.'

Whatsoever teaches us to be cautious in giving up our minds to every pretended guide in religion, who, for his own interest, would lead us into his own prejudices, is true light; for we are bid by our Saviour, 'of ourselves to judge what is

right, to search the Scriptures, and try the spirits of such men, as we would a tree, by their fruits.'

Whatsoever pulls down our pride, teaching us to distrust our own misguided understandings, dispersing the mist of craft and false knowledge, setting us upon our guard against the dictates and motions of our false hearts, and, unmasking our deceitful pleasures, presents them to us in their own natural deformity, is light.

Whatsoever turns our minds to a close and diligent attendance on God's word, which is 'a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths,' is itself also light.

Whatsoever teaches us not to depend upon our own righteousness, but in a deep and true repentance, on the merits and righteousness of Christ, which is all we have to plead in the sight of God, is light.

Whatsoever enables us to make true distinctions between pleasure and happiness, between want and having a little, between riches and having enough, between realities and appearances, between a pleasing evil and a disagreeable good, is light.

Whatsoever refines our sentiments, opens, enlarges, and gives liberty to, our thoughts, still carrying them upward to spiritual entertainments, and rational delights, still raising our affections from things below, and placing them on things above, still turning the attention on a future life, and alarming our hopes and fears with a near and lively view of immortality and eternity; this, whether it is affliction or meditation, whether it is the conversation and example of good men, or whether it is the word and grace of God, is true light.

From recommending it to us, to 'put on the armour of light, and to walk as in the day,' the apostle proceeds to caution us against an opposite kind of course, exhorting us 'to cast off the works of darkness,' of which he mentions only three.

The first is 'rioting and drunkenness,' a vice that cannot bear the light, nor harbour but where there is 'thick darkness, a darkness to be felt' grievously at last, even by the drunkard himself, in sickness and in sudden death; or, at least, by his unhappy family, in confusion and poverty. Where there is even natural reason, the light is too strong

for such a monster of deformity. A reasonable soul cannot but abhor its foulness, and loathe the senseless and low enjoyment it affords. It even seems to be sensible of its own ugliness, and therefore always carries its cloak with it. It conceals its foulness in the stupidity it raises. It screens itself from shame, by banishing all sense of shame; and is the only vice that can be said to hide in itself.

But if it cannot bear the star-light of common sense, how shall it endure the brightness of the gospel; whose precepts tend so directly to refine our sense of pleasure, to improve our understandings, to discountenance all intemperance, particularly this, from whence vices of all other kinds, and of the blackest nature, such as lust, violence, and murder, draw their fuel!

If he, who is drunk, looks not like a man, how shall he look like a Christian? What a figure must he make, when viewed by the light of Christianity, whose face, pale and distorted, resembles death; whose eyes goggle like those of a fool, or stare like those of a madman; whose limbs totter under his body, and whose reason staggers under his soul! And all this, which, if sent upon him by Providence, would seem a judgment sufficient to punish all his other sins, the effect of his own choice, frequently his own deliberate act and deed, in which he rejoices, in which he triumphs, as if it were a glorious exploit.

It is wonderful, that such sights do not make more converts to sobriety, and that what looks so abominable and so shocking in others, should ever please in ourselves. It is amazing that creatures, who are so unable to govern themselves, when in the enjoyment of all the little reason they have, should hasten to strip themselves of that little, and plunge into a condition, which, before they are thoroughly drunk, they are ashamed to be seen in, by those who are not as absolutely brutes as themselves; for all are to be turned out of company, who will not shake hands with reason and humanity, as well as they. This is that darkness, that night, of which the apostle speaks, when he says, 'they that be drunken, be drunken in the night;' which night of their pleasure shall God, according to the burden of Babylon, turn into fear: and then shall come upon them the saying of Isaiah, 'Woe unto them that rise up early in the

morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them. Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness. Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink.' They may, for a time, 'look upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. But, at the last, it will bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder. Their eyes shall behold strange women, and their hearts shall utter perverse things. Yea, they shall be as he that lieth down in the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken us,' shall they say, 'and we were not sick: they have beaten us, and we felt it not. When shall we awake? we will seek it yet again.' Yes, as the dog does his vomit; but, however, 'ye shall perceive, at last, that wine is a mocker, and that whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.'

The second work of darkness, mentioned by St. Paul in this passage, is 'chambering and wantonness;' the cleanest words that could be found to express a vice so foul, that it is almost impossible to speak of it, or even to reprove it, without exceeding the bounds of modesty. It is that vice which brought fire and brimstone upon Sodom; that cut off the city of Sichem at one blow; that made even Samson weak, David a murderer, and Solomon a fool. No man was ever so abandoned, as not to be, in some measure, ashamed of it. For this reason, and because it is seldom committed without an irreparable injury to others, as well as to those who join in it, the greatest darkness is always sought for to screen it. It cannot bear the light of the sun, or even of a candle; much less that of the gospel. But where is that dungeon or privacy to be found, that can hide the committers of such a crime from the all-searching eye of God, 'to whom the darkness and light are both alike?'

If history is consulted, it will be found, that this sin hath proved the ruin of more great men, and powerful kingdoms, than all other sins put together. If the heart is examined, it will be easily perceived, that, of all vices, this finds the readiest entrance, and sinks the deepest into a corrupt heart; that it leaves the foulest stain, and most obstinate habit, behind it. From whence he that is at all concerned about the

salvation of his soul, hath more reason to be alarmed at the approach of such a fiend, though decked out in all the painted disguises of harlotry, than at temptations to vices, that carry their own antidote in a shocking aspect. Fair and tempting as his face may seem, there is not a devil in all the regions of darkness, that draws after him a more dreadful tail and sting.

In the rise, progress, and accomplishment, of this vice, it is altogether foul and shocking. It draws its original from a most detestable passion. It cannot attain its end without breaking through all the restraints of conscience, honour, modesty, religion; without trampling on the sacred duty to parents, or the yet more solemn ties of matrimony. And what does it end in? In immediate shame and remorse; often in private murders, as of Uriah; in public massacres, as of the Hammonites; in ruinous wars, as that between the Benjamites and the other tribes of Israel, about the Levite's concubine; and, what is infinitely worse than all, in impenitence and damnation. If this be not a work of darkness, what is? And yet in this country, which styles itself Christian and reformed, it is in a manner tolerated by law, and openly practised by some, as a genteel amusement, while 'such things are done in secret' by others, who nevertheless pretend to a character, 'as it is a shame to speak of.'

The last work of darkness mentioned by the apostle, in the words that follow my text, is 'strife and envying;' in which, though at first there seems to be two vices expressed, yet, in reality, there is but one, and that is malice, which shews itself chiefly by contention, and discontent at the welfare of others. As this vice never takes up its abode, but in the basest minds, and produces, at the same time, the most odious effects, he who is addicted to it, is generally more detested and despised than any other man. Our minds cannot help spurning at those, with the greatest abhorrence, whom we find impatient at our happiness, comforted with our misery, and ever watching for opportunities to do us all the mischief they can.

And as this is the vice directly opposite to that charity, which stands at the head of the Christian virtues, and crowns them all; as the blessed beings above are joined together by charity, like notes in the same harmony; and the damned

by malice, like fagots, in the same fire; so there is nothing which the fountain of all good abhors so much as the latter, nor is so pleased with as the former.

A vice so detested by God and man, naturally ranks itself among the blackest works of darkness; and therefore lurks as deep as it can, within the gloomy mind that entertains it. However, this prevents it not from venting itself as often as it is in his power; and, when it does, it is like the opening of hell. Nothing but pestilential vapours, devouring flames, serpents armed with fire and stings, and devils thirsting for destruction, issue from it. It feeds on all the miseries it meets, and, when it cannot find misfortunes sufficient to glut its infernal appetite, it makes, and then enjoys them. It holds a general intelligence, that no misfortune may pass by unrejoiced at, nor any happiness of others untainted. It inflames old quarrels, it sows the seeds of new ones. A good character is that which gives it the greatest torment; and therefore, scandal is its favourite instrument, with which helped out by artifice and cunning, it will nurse a groundless insinuation, till it swells to public infamy; so that its malicious secrets are known to all the world, and its whispers heard at a greater distance than thunder. Fame rejoices in being its handmaid, and gives ten times the breath to a scandal, that it does to a good report. How far is this malignant disposition, so full of rancour against mankind, and so incapable of peace with itself, that unless it be pampered with the misfortunes of others, it must, like a stomach without food, prey upon itself; how far is such a disposition from the affectionate, the generous, the forgiving temper of Christianity? As far as darkness from light, and hell from heaven.

Beside these, taken notice of by the apostle, there are other works of darkness, that do no less dishonour to the profession of Christianity; such as luxury, which is the reigning vice of the rich, who generally pass their days in a close application to sensual pleasures. Those of them, who are not chargeable with the grosser vices, think they may be very well allowed the ease and plenty their fortunes afford them; and therefore they say, with the rich man in the gospel, 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.' Thus they 'settle

upon their own lees,' and banish the sense of duty, and remembrance of morality. The screen between their souls and religion becomes too thick for the light to penetrate. In this state of mind, like the gluttonous Israelites, with the flesh of the quails yet unchewed between their teeth, death seizes them, and requires these pampered souls at their hands.

If matters are examined by the light of the gospel, the rich will be found to be only the trustees and stewards of their fortunes, which were not given them by the just God to revel while others pine, and surfeit while thousands starve. We do not perceive, that the rich man in the gospel was charged with any other crime, than making this selfish application of his wealth; and yet we find him soon after in a place of torment, miserably suing for the assistance of that beggar, whom, a little before, he thought scarcely good enough company for his dogs.

However, the sin of luxury does not only consist in this, that the food and clothing of many is by oppression collected, and gluttonously poured into one throat, or ostentatiously spread out upon one back; but more especially in the violent passions and detestable lusts, that are either raised or inflamed by luxury, as if by the mouth of hell. What a figure does this monster make, with its horrid spawn, when viewed by the light of God's word!

Another work of darkness is fraud and treachery. This vice requires a great degree of darkness, both within and about the wretch that is guilty of it; for where there is any light within, it is too ugly to be admitted; and where there is any without, it cannot be executed. Notwithstanding all that is said against it in Scripture, what infinite swarms of people are there, who build their hopes and fortunes on no other foundation! insomuch that the most prudent man in his dealings knows not whom to trust. The word or promise of a man passes for nothing; nay, the long formalities of deeds, and the most wary precautions of bonds, with all the infinite volumes of the law, are, on many occasions, found too weak preservatives of justice, often become the very instruments of fraud. One could hardly imagine human nature capable of contracting a fondness for so base a vice; and yet we every day see those, who could more easily and

certainly attain their ends by honest means, choosing to trust to the success of some pitiful trick, or low evasion; and what is still more surprising, we sometimes find this sort of people, for lack of others to impose on, actually cheating themselves, as if they were afraid of losing the goodly knack for want of practice.

He who is intent on raising and enriching himself, at the expense of others, by indirect means, as he takes his measures in the dark, observes not the risk he himself runs, by walking without light. He is but a more decent sort of thief, who is generally betrayed, by that very night, to which he trusts the success of his crime. With all his cunning, he will find at last, perhaps indeed a little too late, that one, more artful than himself, hath been all the time practising upon him; and hath, while he was cheating others out of worldly trifles, cheated him out of his soul; so 'that he is caught in the crafty wiliness which he imagined, and in the net which he hid privily for others are his own feet taken;' so true it is, that the knave is always a fool.

Another work of darkness, and one of the blackest, is perjury; which, in order to be guilty of, a man must shut out God from his thoughts, at the very instant he is appealing to him by his words, in the most solemn manner; for it is not to be supposed, that a man, who is guilty of so great injustice and impiety, can have either God or religion before his eyes at the time. So nice a peculiarity cannot fail of making it extremely difficult to place one's mind in such a degree of darkness, as is necessary for the committal of this crime. Yet so great, and so frequent is the call for this horrible instrument of iniquity, and so ready are the ill-principled part of mankind to answer this infernal call for gain, that an oath may be had at a cheap rate, for any purpose, though ever so enormous. So common are perjuries grown, that the most insignificant jobs, which gross folly, low knavery, or trifling spite, can have to do, find themselves immediately furnished with affidavits. It is a short and easy method to carry any little point by an affidavit or two. It is only scoring on the conscience, and so there is nothing to be feared, till the day of judgment. Recourse is therefore had to it on all occasions, whence proceeds the surprising fruitfulness of the commodity.

A lie is, in itself, a work of darkness, sufficiently base and scandalous, a sin, which, in holy Scripture, stands distinguished among other sins, by being peculiarly ascribed to the devil, as its author. But when God is solemnly called upon to bear witness to the truth of a lie, which is applied to the establishing some grievous piece of injustice, it then sets before us one work of darkness enclosed within another, and that within a third, so bold and impious, as hardly to admit of a comparison.

These distinguished works of darkness make their approaches to our minds by others, equally mischievous in their consequences, but not branded by vulgar repute with so black a name. It is impossible to be particular in so great a crowd. I shall therefore only lay down some general rules, by the observation of which, the springs of all that is vile and wicked may be discovered and avoided by you, who, perhaps, are not furnished already with a more particular and perfect knowledge of these things.

That which helps you to impose on yourself, to cloak or lessen your sins, to raise your opinion of your own worth, to make you partial to yourself, or indulgent to your own weaknesses, is an instrument of darkness.

That which blunts reflection, by either stupifying the mind, or amusing it with vain entertainments, with idle hopes or fears, is an instrument of darkness.

That which hinders you from attending to, and pursuing your greatest interest, and leads you off to the pursuit of small or false interests, such as the flesh or the world set before you, is an instrument of darkness.

That which renders you deaf, or averse to good advice, particularly that of your spiritual guide, is an instrument of darkness.

That which hinders the mind from attending to the truths of religion, and, by making its arguments seem weak and disagreeable, enfeebles and staggers its faith, is an instrument of darkness.

That which renders the mind cold and careless in attending the service of God, in visiting and conversing with him at his house, and by his word, in keeping the Sabbath, according to the nature and end of its institution, in celebrating the sacrament of the Lord's supper; inasmuch as

these are the great inlets of Christian light, you may assure yourself, is an instrument of gross and dangerous darkness.

As a Christian, by the light of your religion, you may easily take a view, from one end to the other, of that road which is filled with works of darkness. You may clearly see, that, although it is wide and easy at the entrance, yet, at some distance, it grows more narrow and craggy, and that those unhappy people who travel on it, grow blacker and uglier every step they advance; till, by degrees, they contract a shocking resemblance to certain frightful beings, that stand at the lower end of it to receive them. Is it possible you can see such a road as this, and perceive the dreadful place it ends in, and yet choose to enter into it, or continue on it? Does your religion afford you its light for no other purpose, but to expose the blindness and extravagance of your ways, while you seek what it were better you should never find; and shun what you ought to pursue? Unthinking wretch! you search for happiness, as if it were not placed directly before your eyes; and although it is recommended to your desires by all that is great and glorious, you knock at riches, and ask, is it here? You inquire of honour, whether it be there? You apply to power, but it cannot command it. You search for it in sensual pleasures, but cannot find it. You ransack all the vices, but meet with no footsteps of it. What can you hope for, after so many disappointments, from these 'unfruitful works of darkness,' the pursuit of which is only vanity and vexation, and 'the wages death?' Wherefore, 'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' And, 'See that you walk circumspectly, not as a fool, but as wise, redeeming the time.'

And now may God be graciously pleased to put away from us all 'works of darkness;' may he 'put on us the armour of light;' may he raise us out of our sleep of sin, and enable us 'to walk honestly, as in the day,' through Jesus Christ our Saviour; to whom, with God the Father of lights, and God the blessed Comforter, be all might, majesty, and honour, now, and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXXV.

WOE TO THE DRUNKARD.

ISAIAH v. 22.

Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink.

THERE are certain vices, which, considered in themselves, can by no means be ranked among crimes of the deepest die, and which therefore, common opinion, and the customs of particular countries, seem to place only in the number of human infirmities, and mere misdemeanors. And yet, if these vices are judiciously weighed by the multitude of their unhappy effects, they will be found, perhaps, to look as black and frightful, as those sins, that call for the severest punishments from men, and the most terrible judgments from God.

That drunkenness is one, or rather the chief of these, I hope the present discourse will fully prove, by shewing, that it is the source of innumerable other vices; that the woe denounced in my text, against those who distinguish themselves for an uncommon ability in this vice, is made up of the unavoidable effects it produces; and that this woe, or these effects, are too dear a price to be paid by a reasonable creature for all the sensual pleasures of this life, did they accompany this single sin.

But, before we proceed to disclose this woe in all the variety of misery it contains, it may not be amiss to remove out of our way those excuses, the drunkard usually brings in his defence, that, when his punishment comes to be laid open, his understanding, so dark and unthinking in itself, may not have these also to blind its sight, and throw a veil over the gloomy and horrible prospect.

The drunkard's first excuse is charged to the account of good fellowship: he drinks, if we believe him, not that he loves the liquor, but that he may promote friendship, and give a greater gaiety to conversation.

How words are abused? Did the dish or the bottle ever make a real friend? Surely friendship can never be founded on any thing else, than a sweet and affectionate disposition, a likeness of temper, and true honesty of heart, on both sides. Will strong drink bestow these on us? Can mutual love and confidence be built on vice? On a vice, which, of all others, most effectually impairs the memory, and with it the sense of all obligations? On a vice, remarkable for blabbing and betraying secrets? On a vice, that unavoidably hurries those that are addicted to it, to a speedy ruin of that foundation, on which it raises the short-lived union of drunkards, by bringing them soon to an end, either of their fortunes, or their lives? What then is the friendship of drunkards? It is only the heat of strong liquor, smoking out either in wild unmeaning professions of love, with a mixture of nauseous kisses, and sour belches, or in loud oaths or unguarded expressions, usually ending in quarrels and broken heads; which I shall as readily allow to be the testimonies of true friendship, as the professions and kisses already mentioned.

And how doth drunkenness promote the gaiety of conversation? Does it not destroy all conversation; for what is conversation, but the communication of rational and agreeable thoughts? If conversation is to begin where thinking ends, may it be my lot to have no one to converse with. Surely it is better to live in a desart, than a bedlam, especially if I am to be as mad as the other lodgers. The man of sense and spirit needs not the assistance of strong liquors; and is never more gay and agreeable, than rising from a calm and natural night's rest. On the other hand, in vain doth the stupid blockhead hope, that strong drink will give wings to his heavy soul. It is impossible for him to find a moment's medium of sprightliness between his natural dulness, and his drunken madness. Such a one may be a fool or a madman; but he can never be a wit; even his ridiculous flashes, of which he is so vain, are not the issues of his own brain, but of a bottle; and are nothing better than the froth of what he hath drank. If he makes his company merry, do they not rather laugh at him, than with him? Do not silly people, like them, laugh at a natural fool, for no other reason, but because they are tickled with the sight of

one who is even sillier than themselves? And if they should at any time express their admiration by their mirth, certainly it is hard to say, whether the stupid and empty jest, or the senseless peal of laughter that roars in its applause, is the stronger proof of folly. To imagine that strong drink can help to pump wit out of a blockhead, is surely a strange opinion; buffoonry indeed, and impertinence, with wild flights and sallies, it may. He, who is so void of sense, as to seek for honour this way, knows not what honour is, and it is folly next his own, to spend time with him; and therefore I shall dismiss him with the words of the prophet, 'shameful spewing shall be on his glory.'

The next excuse for drinking to excess, is, that it stupifies the cares and troubles of the drunkard; which arise from three different quarters; his ill state of health, the unfortunate posture of his worldly affairs, or the stings of his guilty conscience.

As to his ill health, it must be owned indeed, that in some cases, a temperate use of generous liquors may be of considerable service; and accordingly, physicians often prescribe it, as St. Paul did to Timothy, for a strengthener of low spirited and feeble constitutions. But this hath nothing to do with the point we are handling, which is drunkenness, a vice we are not at liberty to practise, even to procure health, or prolong life, were it in any measure useful for those ends. But so far is it from being either, that poison cannot more surely, though it may more speedily, hurt us in both respects. The health of a man depends as absolutely on the right state of his brain, as his reason does; insomuch that it is impossible to hurt the one, without proportionably impairing the other. There is hardly a disease, of which intemperance, especially excess in drinking, is not the cause, or at least the fuel. Strong liquors, if taken in too great a quantity, corrupt and inflame the blood, burn and shrivel the nerves, dry up and thicken the spirits, and remarkably impair the brain, as may be seen by the immediate effect they have on it, which is as violent and manifest, as the stroke of a staff or stone; only with this difference, that if such an outward impression do not deprive us of life and reason, it soon ceases; whereas in the case of drunkenness, the cause of our disorder, being mixed with the blood,

the spirits, and the very substance of the brain, is not to be removed without more time, more difficulty, and more danger. We are by no means to imagine, that the ill effects of intemperance cease with the drunken fit, or with the sickness of stomach, and aching head, that succeed. The frequent repetition of such excesses cannot but greatly distress a body, the health and life of which depend on parts so extremely fine and delicate, that David, reflecting on it with just apprehensions, says, 'I am fearfully and wonderfully made.' Our experience confirms this reasoning two ways; both by the ill health, and short life, of great drinkers; and by the common practice of physic, which begins the cure of most disorders, by emptying the body of those foul sinks, with which intemperance had filled it. The physician and surgeon owe the greater part of their business to the cook and the vintner, who lay in, what they are feed to remove by pukes, purges, blistering, bleeding, and spitting; and to perfect the cure, a long course of low and cool feeding is generally prescribed. From hence may appear the absurdity of his excuse, who says, he gets drunk to comfort his spirits, and retrieve his sickly constitution.

Now his excuse, who drinks hard to stifle his concern for the unfortunate posture of his worldly affairs, is, if possible, still more senseless and desperate. The drunkard will not leave himself sense enough to consider, that his vice does not tend to the improvement of his fortune; the only remedy, humanly speaking, his cares admit of; and that it can do no more, than for a time make him forget he is in debt or distress. If thought, and the sense of his poverty, were never to return, this might be a complete cure for his grief. But to forget his distress, is the way to neglect his affairs, by no means to retrieve them; and to buy this short forgetfulness with such expenses, as drunkenness is always attended with, is the sure way to put his affairs on a more distressful footing, than mere neglect could have occasioned. But if he is already in distress, and cannot bear so much as to think of it, what will be his case, when neglect and extravagance shall have wasted all he has, so that his stupid remedy, and his ruined fortune, shall fail him both at once? Then, to which hand shall he turn him? 'He cannot work: to beg he is ashamed.' Most unhappy man! his

misery admits of no change, but a jail; of no end, but a halter.

But great as the folly is of drinking to stupify a bodily disorder, or to drive away the cares arising from worldly distress; it is mere wisdom, if compared to that of drinking to stifle the stings of a guilty conscience. If one vice could furnish a cure, or make an atonement for another, we might, with some shew of reason, apologize for all our vices. It is true the drunkard may, for a time, drown his conscience in strong liquor, and silence its clamours with the noise of his roaring companions; but must he not sometimes be sober? And will not his conscience then have its revenge? Will not the violence he hath done to it by the new additional vice whet its stings, and drive them into his soul with double force and torture? Remorse and dread of eternal punishment were given him for a remedy against sin; and it is by them that God calls him to repentance and mercy. But because this voice of God is alarming and terrible, he flies to the devil for protection, although all he expects from that quarter, is the benefit of travelling some part of the road to eternal misery with his eyes covered. To act such a part as this, is to insult Almighty God, even under his rod, and to his face; is to give up heaven for ever; and, with the obstinacy, the terror, and despair of a devil, to plunge blindfold into that misery, in comparison of which, the most violent agonies of conscience are mere peace and pleasure.

The drunkard hath other more uncommon and accidental excuses for his vice; but they need not a particular refutation; for he rather pleads them to himself, as human infirmities, than avows them to others, as reasons, by which he would hope to prove he is neither altogether so foolish, or so wicked, as his neighbours might suppose him to be.

He says, he is so exposed to company and business, that it is impossible for him to avoid drinking to excess. Then he is of so easy and so flexible a temper, that he cannot resist the importunities of his friends, as he calls them. Thus he is for softening his vice into a sort of virtue, and calling that mere good-nature, which his creditor calls villany, and his wife and children cruelty. But he will never own, that so low an appetite as the love of liquor, or so shameful a weakness, as vanity, deserve any share of the blame, that he is a

drunkard. And yet, after all, here lies the stumbling-block, over which the habitual drunkard falls. He may have a great soul, but it is not quite so great, as to enable him to despise the pleasure he finds in gratifying this appetite, nor the censure of other drunkards, who would call him penurious, did he not run into the same extravagance with themselves. Nay, great as his soul is, it does not hinder him from being vain, that he can hold more liquor than other men, though in this, as the philosopher observed, the hogshead has still the advantage of him; nor from vaunting this superiority of his strength, in being able to sit and speak, after drinking the same quantity that hath laid the rest of the company on the floor, though for this he ought to thank his thick skull, and heavy spirits.

We will however, for once allow, that the temptations, which ensnare the drunkard, are great enough to prevent the imputation of his having less sense and soul, than the liar, the thief, or other sinners of that rank; and we will proceed to lay before him the woe denounced against him by Almighty God; or in other words, the miserable effects, as well temporal as spiritual, of his favourite vice, that he may compare those effects with his temptations, in order to see which is the greatest. After this he may judge for himself, by his reforming, or continuing in the vice, whether he hath any remains of common sense, or any right to look on himself as a great and generous soul.

The first temporal ill effect of his drunkenness, which I shall take notice of, as contained in the woe, with which he is threatened, is poverty. This must certainly fall to his lot, though his fortune might at first have been very great; for such extravagance and neglect of his affairs, as must accompany the vice of drunkenness, cannot fail to put it out of his power to support himself and his family in that rank of living to which they are used, which they expected always to appear in, and from which therefore they cannot be brought down, without greater shame and anxiety, than people in lower life usually feel from absolute want of bread. Now this is poverty; and such poverty, as his wife and children will find means to make him feel a share of; although there is still so much left that he may drink on, and be the despicable slave of his worse than beastly appetite, as long as he

lives; which cannot be very long, for his purse must soon prove too hard for his constitution, and lead him, through a course of pain and sickness, to an untimely death. And now he is a dying, what account can he give of his understanding, who hath paid his fortune, his health, and all the cleanly and comfortable satisfactions of life, with life itself, for a short course, full of confusion, sickness, reproach, and trouble? for such, undoubtedly, is the life of a drunkard. 'Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babblings? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine, they that go to seek mixed wine.'

But when he, who hath no more than enough to support his family, turns a drunkard, he soon runs out his little stock, and reduces the whole family to the last distress. In this situation, he finds himself surrounded with hunger, thirst, and cold. Abroad he is mortified with continual repulses and contempt; at home with the reproaches of a wife in distress, and children crying to him for bread. And is it only to tickle his palate, or for the pleasure of a grin, that he tramples on the ties of nature; that he strips the children of that which is necessary to defend them from the cold; that he snatches the bit from the mouth of his little infant, already pining for want of food? His sorry companions, who share the spoils of a heart-broken wife, and ruined family, may cry up his good-nature, and call him a honest fellow; but reason, common sense, and Christianity, call him a monster of villany and cruelty. And, to finish all, the curse of God pursues him into banishment, or a jail; where his goodly companions forsake him, and no man pities him; where, perhaps, he may live to hear his wife is begging her bread, his daughter earning hers by prostitution, and his son sentenced to the gallows.

The next woe, denounced by God, and the nature of things, against the drunkard, is universal contempt. We all know, how lightly the poor man is regarded, although his poverty is owing to no neglects or vices of his; but when poverty is brought on by vice and extravagance, then contempt and disdain are justly due to it. Now, he who once held up his head, and lived in credit, finds it extremely difficult, to bear with patience the continual snubs and insults,

which those who were once his equals, perhaps his inferiors, are but too apt to throw upon him, now that he is down. Nay, his poverty makes him take that for an affront, which was never intended as such. Add to all this, that he who was once high and haughty, is now forced to cringe, to sneak, and flatter, for the very necessaries of life, and to stoop to be the pitiful spunge of every low company that will bear him, for a little drink. Had he the spirit he pretended to, when he was formerly ranting it in houses of public resort, these mortifications would be worse to him than a thousand deaths.

The third dreadful effect, contained in the woe denounced against him, is ill health, and an untimely death. Of this I have said enough already. But the drunkand declares for a short life and a merry; and accordingly hopes to have his wish. Setting aside the atheistical guilt of such a wish, what security can he give himself, that his health and fortune will last as long as his life? Hath he not known many others of the same stamp, who have laboured under all the complaints of old age, before they were thirty? Who have been whole years a dying, ere they arrived at that stage? Nay, who, at the best, had so much distraction, so many head-aches, so many untoward accidents, with innumerable other mischiefs, as were enough to sink their brightest days to a level with those of the sober, in which they had least pleasure?

The fourth and last temporal evil, which I shall insist on, as comprehended in the woe threatened to the drunkard by my text, is madness. Man owes the dignity of his nature to his reason, by which he is both distinguished from the brute creation, and qualified for dominion over that, and the rest of this world. It is by his reason also that he is allied to angels, and enabled to know God in his word and works here, and to enjoy him for ever hereafter. Every man is more happy in himself, and more highly esteemed by others, in proportion as he shews more reason or wisdom in his discourse and actions. We may therefore safely say, that nothing more unfortunate can befall a man in this world, than the loss of his reason. This all men must acknowledge, who are in their senses themselves. What then shall we

say of him, who places his happiness in madness? Who will risk his life for a fortune, and afterward give that fortune, together with his health, his character, and his conscience, to purchase madness? Surely had he not been a fool of the first rate before, he could never have wished to become a madman, and that at so great an expense. Had he ever known the use of reason, it is impossible he should desire to lose it.

Now he who is drunk, was this fool, and is this madman, this voluntary, this wilful madman. To get drunk, is to be mad by choice; and accordingly, Pythagoras called drunkenness, an attempt to be mad. The prophet Hosea says, it is madness. 'Wine and women, and new wine, take away the heart;' by which he meant the understanding. But the drunkard will say, this fit of distraction lasts only for a short time; to which we may answer, that if it were a desirable condition, he ought to wish it might last for ever; for, by the same rule that he would not have it continue, he ought never to desire it should begin. It doth not however appear by his practice, that he hath any aversion to its continuance, for he drinks as long, and as often, as he is able; and it seems to be owing only to the weakness of his body, or the shallowness of his purse, that he is not always mad. Perhaps it would be better for him to be so, since he is but a fool when sober; for, fool as he is, those reflections can reach him in that state, which, in a state of madness, can give him no uneasiness. Total madness may seem more shocking to men in their senses, but is not so grievous to the madman, as that which sometimes gives way to the use of reason, wherein the wretch becomes sensible of his unhappy ailment. This is more true of the drunken madman than of any other; for when he becomes sober, he awakens only to a sense of sickness, of distress to himself and family; and, as he cannot reform, to a prospect that still looks more black and frightful, the farther he casts his eyes over it; to a prospect, in short, that presents him with poverty and sickness just before him, with an untimely death a little farther, and, beyond that, with damnation. To a man, thus circumstanced, the return of his reason must be his highest affliction, and that of his madness his only refuge. Accord-

ingly he hastens again to the bottle, that he may there drown that enemy, his reason, and, with it, the intolerable sense of his misery.

Were the woe of the drunkard confined to these temporal evils, it might be sufficient, one would think, to frighten him from a vice so very grievous in its effects. But these evils, great and afflicting as they really are in themselves, are nothing at all, if compared to the spiritual evils that spring from, and punish, the vice of drunkenness. Their multitude is so great, that I hardly know how to be particular in such a crowd; and they are so very shocking in their nature, that it distresses the imagination, clearly to conceive and describe them. However, lest we should lose our way, it may not be amiss to follow this method: First, let us take notice, that drunkenness is itself a crime; and, secondly, let us consider what other vices spring out of it, and draw their fuel from it.

That drunkenness is a crime, every one must acknowledge, who either reflects on the abuse of God's creatures, that were given, and ought to be applied, to better purposes; or considers the violence done to human nature in the ruin of health and reason, without which the practice of hard drinking cannot be pursued. He is certainly criminal, who lavishes on his own filthy appetite, that which, if divided, might support the spirits of many, who are forced to live on poorer food, and to waste their strength in much harder labours, than either necessity or inclination ever reduced him to. On the other hand, he must still be more highly criminal, in destroying his health, and understanding. In destroying his health, he also shortens his life, and so far is guilty of self-murder, as he quits the world before the will of his Maker and Master calls him off. And in destroying his reason, he makes his life useless and burdensome to the world; and, as to the ends and purposes of life, differs from the self-murderer only in this; that whereas the self-murderer leaves the world when he ought to stay in it, and do good; the drunkard, who also leaves it before his time, loiters a while first, to do mischief.

Now, as to the other vices and sins that spring out of drunkenness, and draw their fuel from thence, they amount to neither more nor less than the entire catalogue of all the

crimes that human nature can be guilty of. We need not dwell on sins of omission, because it is evident, at first sight, that the drunkard must be chargeable with them all; for a man so sunk in health and fortune, and destitute of reason, can do no good, can answer no one end of his creation. It might however 'be more tolerable for him in the day of judgment,' were this all, and did he not stand accountable for an infinite deal of positive, as well as negative evil.

If it is virtue to have all the passions, affections, and appetites, in absolute subjection to reason, and reason to true religion; he must be thoroughly prepared for all manner of wickedness, whose affections and passions are inflamed to the highest pitch of fury, and whose reason is either wholly banished, or so extremely enfeebled, as to deprive it of all authority and strength. Now, it is the property of excess in drinking to put a man exactly in this condition; for while his strong liquors kindle up a fire in his affections, they extinguish his understanding, they chain down his reason, while they lay the lash and spur to his passions.

In this state of mind, he is fitted by his enemy for every temptation, just as gunpowder is for fire. All laws, human and divine, are alike to him, for 'he neither fears God, nor regards man.' He mixes the awful name of his Maker with discourse so silly and so lewd, that it would be a dishonour to his harlot to be the subject of it. He hath no more respect for the Sabbath-day, than for any other day; nor does he indeed make any material difference between night and day; for he is one of those, who, according to the saying of Isaiah, 'put darkness for light, and light for darkness. His table,' which as the prophet expresses it, 'is full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean, is not more an abomination to the Lord, than the Lord's table is to him.'

Extravagance like his must be supported, pay for it who will; but, generally speaking, cannot be supported without cruelty and oppression, without deceit and fraud: I say fraud; for though he is seldom in the use of his reason, yet, like many other madmen, he hath cunning enough for his purpose, which is only to raise money; a thing that may be done, without any great reach of thought, by one who is

no way nice about his conscience, or character. The sober part of the world look on the drunkards as madmen; and the drunkards are at no small pains to set themselves out as a honest undesigning sort of men, who hurt nobody, but themselves. Yet they gladly run in debt where they have credit, and never pay till they are forced. They make no scruple of fleecing every one under their power, till they are as bare as themselves. How can their tenant, or their servant, take this ill, since they do not treat their own wives and children a whit better? Notwithstanding all this, we must take it for granted, they are very honest men, for no one is hanged for such things as these, nor for combining over a bottle, and spending the night in forming schemes of iniquity, in which they unite their interests and strength with a kind of cunning, that often proves too hard for the prudence of wiser men, whose hands are tied up by a real regard to truth and justice. It would be endless to run over the malicious scandals that are born, the filthy jobs that are formed, and the unfair advantages that are pursued and carried, in bargains, in references, and in all sorts of business, by the assistance of this fruitful vice.

As hard drinking is not more apt to stifle reason, than it is to banish all sense of shame, and modesty from the mind of the drunkard, while it heats his lustful passions and lewd desires to a peculiar rage, it drives him into fornication, adultery, and every act of pollution, the corrupt imagination of man is capable of conceiving. It turns out the lascivious brute without a bridle, and hurries him into such a sink of uncleanness, as decency forbids description to approach. Hence it is that lewd houses are always furnished with strong liquors; that in case the wretch, who resorts to these porches of hell, hath not yet dosed himself sufficiently, he may there find wherewithal to give him a taste gross enough for the dung, and a stomach strong enough for the poison, with which he is to be regaled. Nowhere on earth, and hardly in hell, is there any thing to be found more odious, more detestable, and more shocking, than a lewd and shameless woman. Besides it is generally known, or believed, that she is a lump of painted rottenness, of perfumed stench, and that she brings with her a deadly infection, to the body, as well as the soul of him, who touches her. What is it now

that can lead a reasonable creature into her snare? Nothing, absolutely nothing. A man must have lost his reason, and become a brute, before he can so much as think of turning his eyes towards a sight so detestable. To what a pitch must a man's blood be fired! to what a depth must his taste be lowered! to what a distraction must his understanding be driven, either by the devil, or strong liquor, before he is capable of taking such a fiend for an angel, or an object of love and desire!

In this respect the effects of drunkenness in women are still more shameful and shocking than in men. To see that person, which nature intended for neatness and sweetness, all loose and filthy; that face which should be the seat of comeliness and beauty, all bloated and distorted; and those eyes, in which modesty and chastity should sit enthroned, staring impudence, and goggling lust; which is remarkably the case of a woman flustered with liquor, is a thing shocking, abominable, horrible, beyond all imagination or description. Yet horrible as it is, I am sorry to say it, such sights are of late by no means uncommon. I should be also infinitely surprised, that men could for a moment, endure them, or forbear flying from them to the ends of the earth, did I not consider, that what they are so easily reconciled to in themselves, they must be well enough prepared to tolerate in the other sex. But men in their senses cannot forbear pronouncing him miserable, who hath such a wife, and them unhappy, who have such a mother; for neither to him, nor them, can she in any sort discharge the duties of the place she is in.

Nothing but reason can give a man a right sense of his own infirmity and vileness, and teach him that humility, which becomes so dependant, so guilty, a creature. But when this is banished by strong liquor, and the spirits begin to mount on its fiery vapours, then pride rises with them, and lords it over the heart. The drunken dunce applauds his own understanding, and betrays that want of sense, which sober, he might have concealed. The coward conceits himself an hero, and engages in a quarrel, which must cost him a shameful submission to-morrow. The beggar, now grown a lord, must drink and pay according to his new title, though hunger and rags are immediately to follow.

Pride soon begets insolence and rudeness; insomuch that every one will give the greatest, and none bear the slightest, affront. The most unmeaning, and often the kindest expressions, are wrested and resented. In the midst of harsh gibing, loud laughing, and boisterous talking, resembling, to a sober ear, the quarrelling of a parcel of dogs, it would be very surprising, if anger should not be roused by such a cry; or, when roused, if it should not vent itself in bitter reproaches, broils, broken heads, bloodshed, and even murder.

You see, by this time, that drunkenness travels with a huge train of other vices, and requires the whole width of the broad way to give it room. Where its journey is to end, you know; so that if the guilt and misery which attend it here, be not enough, there, at least, the drunkard having to his horror, opened his eyes, and recovered the use of his reason, will perceive the truth of my text, and acknowledge, that great, beyond all power of conception, is the woe denounced against them that are 'mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink.'

It is a common remark, whether strictly true or not, I shall by no means stay to inquire, that no drunken woman was ever reformed. It is however certainly true, that the vice of drunkenness is itself much harder to be reformed, and makes all the other vices of the drunkard much more difficult to be subdued, both in men and women, than any other kind of wickedness whatsoever. How this comes to pass, is easily conceived. Other vices leave a man the use of his reason, and consequently some handle for advice and reflections to lay hold of. But this having degraded him to a senseless brute, makes it almost as ridiculous to reason with him, as with an ass or a swine. And as to the hope of reformation from the grace of God, it shocks common sense, and all our notions of religion, even to conceive, that the Holy Spirit should come to, or remain in, a man who is often drunk. No: such a habitation is fitted up for another kind of spirit.

However, it may not be altogether useless to preach on this subject, since, by so doing, they who are not addicted to the vice, may be prevented from falling into it; and he who is but lately fallen, may be snatched from the

mouth of this gulf. To such a one as this, let me 'cry with a lamentable voice,' like that of Darius, when he called to Daniel in the lion's den, 'O thou servant of the living God,' is thy infinitely gracious Master willing 'to deliver thee from that lion, that goeth about seeking whom he may devour,' and hath unhappily got thee into his den? Or, hast thou thyself sense enough left to know where thou art, and what sort of company thou art in? Wilt thou not come forth while God still offers thee his help, and thou hast yet some strength to fight thy way.

'If you have ears to hear, let them hear.' God gave you reason that you might know and practise your duty. To stupify it with strong liquor will not excuse you, for that is itself a very provoking sin; and one sin can never be made a cloak, or an apology, for another; it can only increase the guilt, and double the punishment. God gave you natural spirits to be as cheerful as he approves of, or as a due sense of your sins should suffer you to be. Let those content you; and pray consider, that a poor guilty wretch, like you, hath no right to a high excess of mirth, were that mirth ever so innocent in its kind. Hear what Solomon says in this case, 'It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting. Sorrow is better than laughter. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.' God gave you health that you might turn it to his service, your own comfort, and the good of the community; particularly of your own family: do not apply it to the very contrary ends; do not sacrifice it to the devil. God hath put it in your power to provide necessaries for your family; perhaps to relieve the distresses of the poor; do you think this wise Master, who would by no means excuse your wrapping it in a napkin, will suffer you to go unpunished, if you make use of it to destroy all your other talents of health, time, understanding; to promote all other vices, lust, wrath, oppression, perhaps murder; to turn yourself from a rational creature into a brute, from a Christian into a devil, or rather into such a mixture of brute and devil, as the swine were, when a legion of evil spirits had entered into them, and were hurrying them down the precipice to death and destruction? If God sends the sunshine and rain on your fields,

and blesses your labours with a plentiful increase; or, if he prospers you in the way of trade; shall you immediately 'forget who gave you all this abundance,' and, in a fit of drunkenness, offer up to the devil the first-fruits of God's bounty to you? You see I speak to you on a supposition that you have gathered what you have by the blessing of God on your industry, or other fair and lawful methods. But if you have got it by fraud or oppression, no part of this discourse is intended for you. The devil hath a sort of a right to expect from you a profitable return on one vice, out of that which he helped you to by another; and God will admit no offerings nor services from substance so acquired, till repentance and restitution have put it into the hands of the right owners. You wish, perhaps, in some fit of sickness, pray, for health; will you endeavour to drink it away when you have got it? Would you have God work a miracle to restore the health, and prolong the life, of so perverse a fool, only that you may be drunk by the year, or by the century? Do you ever, in a lucid interval, go on your knees? If you do, what is it you ask of God? Give me leave to guess. Perhaps you sometimes pray for wisdom, in imitation of David, who said, 'O give me understanding, and I shall live;' and of Solomon, who 'chose it rather than riches.' But how can you, who labour to destroy your reason, desire wisdom? Do you think this gift of God, also may be employed in procuring money to be expended on your detestable vice? You pray likewise for 'your daily bread;' but is it to impose on Providence, by drinking instead of eating it? Do 'you ask' the necessaries of life 'to consume them on your lusts?' If thus 'you ask bread,' will not God serve you right, 'if he give you a stone?' If thus 'you ask an egg,' can you complain, 'if he should give you a scorpion?'

Diogenes threw on the ground a large vessel of wine, that was bestowed him; and when the giver took it amiss, 'Why,' said this heathen, 'if I had drank it, I had but spilt it, and myself too into the bargain.' Shall he not rise in judgment against the men of this generation, and condemn them, to whom Christ, both by precept and example, preaches not only temperance, but abstinence? How shall you, a Christian drunkard (O the contradictory expression!) hold up your face at the last day, before that other heathen philosopher,

who said, 'The first glass for thirst, the second for cheerfulness, the third for pleasure, the fourth for madness?' You could teach him another lesson, the fifth for poverty, the sixth for rags, the seventh for hunger, the eighth for cold, the ninth for contempt, the tenth for vomiting, the eleventh for the devil, and the twelth for damnation; and yet you are but in the middle of your career.

Let me ask you a very important question: Do you intend ever to reform? If you do, why not now? It will be much easier to do it now, than any time hence. I remember on my speaking in this manner to a noted drunkard some years ago, he told me, he did fully intend to quit the vice, but he saw no reason for being in haste. This unhappy man continued his course for more than a year afterward, and ended it with breaking his neck in a fit of drunkenness. Have you any reason to promise yourself a better end? A young man came drunk and reeling into the school of Zeno the philosopher, who changed his subject to such a lecture against drunkenness, as roused the profligate to a sense of his folly, and to an effectual resolution never to be drunk again. Shall the word of God have less force in my mouth than mere human reasoning had in that of Zeno? Or shall you, who are now sober, be more impenetrable to religion, than that young Pagan, in the midst of a debauch, to a sort of philosophy, that was not founded on faith in the true God, nor an expectation of heaven or hell? If this is the case, tell it not to unbelievers, publish it not among the enemies of Christ, lest they take an occasion from thence to deride and blaspheme the religion you profess.

But if the force of reason, the power of God's word, and the divine grace, are now struggling with your abominable vice, turn your heart to your duty; fix a firm resolution against the vile unworthy sin; let God have the victory, and to him, in the unity of the ever blessed Trinity, be the praise, the honour, and the glory, now and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXXVI.

PRIDE AN HUMBLER.

PROV. XXIX. 23.

A man's pride shall bring him low.

THE author of human nature hath planted in every man a greater love for himself, than for any thing else in the world; insomuch that, were he left merely to the motions of nature, he would prefer his own interest, his happiness, and his life, to those of all mankind. Now where there is so much love, there must be some esteem; there is, therefore, in every man, some degree of esteem for himself. Since, then, self-esteem is as natural to us as self-love, every degree of it cannot be culpable, for God will never judge us for that which he himself hath made a part of our nature. We say of a man whom we think proud, He hath too good an opinion, or he sets too high a value on himself; by which it plainly appears, we do not blame him for having some esteem for himself, but only for having too much.

What, then is pride, considered as a vice? It is the having too great an esteem for ourselves on account of some inward excellence which we either have not, or over value; or on account of some outward advantages, which we are too apt to value ourselves upon, as if they made a part of ourselves. Pride, like all other vices, consists not in the natural affection itself, but proceeds from the abuse or excess of it.

The setting too great a value on ourselves is that vice of pride, which 'brings a man low,' which 'comes before a fall;' and which is threatened in Scripture, and, by the natural make of men and things, with perpetual and grievous mortifications. The whole world, with all the persons and things of which it is composed, are so framed by their Maker, as to enter into a natural combination to pull down pride.

All men have more or less of pride; and therefore are jealous of the respect paid to others, and infinitely offended at another's seeming to respect himself. Honour and praise are things about which men contend, as if they could not be shared; for there is hardly any one who is satisfied to be commended or respected upon a level with others, but would have all the compliments and praises paid to himself: if he can be content with a preference, he is judged to have some modesty.

Again; he who does not receive some respect, will pay none: as if honour was a kind of trade, in which every man (such is his opinion of himself) thinks what he hath to give, is worth all he can receive from his neighbours. He, therefore, who seems to respect himself above others, and to set up for engrossing all the esteem of his acquaintance, cannot but miss of his aim; because he must be most distasteful to the rest of mankind, who act too nearly upon the same principles, especially if he appears to overbear or extort that esteem. The pride of one man will not suffer him to bear the pride of another. This is the spring of all that outward respect and civility with which well-bred people, and such as know the world, are obliged to treat one another; and they are of no small use among persons in whom honour, and vanity, and self-respect, run so high. However highly each of them may think of himself, and despicably of others; yet, if this is artfully concealed, he may hope to be paid in the same coin, and treated with such a shew of respect, as, being construed by vanity to its own advantage, may serve the fool almost as well as real regard.

If he desires any more than mere civility, if he would have a shew of respect more solid; for instance, if he hopes to have others speak well of him behind his back; he must pay a much higher purchase for this higher mark of esteem; he must cringe so much the lower to them; he must flatter them when present, and cry them up to the stars when absent; or, he may assure himself, they will never fill their trumpets with his praises; but, on the contrary, vilify him on all occasions. He would do well, however, to consider how low he must stoop, to raise himself in the opinion of others; how little he must make himself, in order to this

sort of greatness. Now, as there can be nothing more mean or preposterous than to beg respect, to aim at praise by flattery; or honour, by servility; to compliment him whom he hates; to applaud the man whom he despises; to tickle the vanity of others with gross lies, and base dissimulation; that they, in return, may feed his with the same chaff, so his pride, seeking to gratify itself by such means as these, miserably acts against its own intention, and brings him low, even to the ground. Christianity does not require humility itself to stoop so low.

Nothing, one would think, bids so fair to raise a man to honour and esteem, as the doing of good. But this can only recommend us to the esteem of a few, and a few can never give a man that general applause which pride looks for. The greater part of that scanty class of men, who like a man for doing good, are too apt to mistake a good action for the contrary; to attribute the good that is done to low motives; and to take our characters, after having done the best we can, from worse men than themselves, who find a pleasure in artfully giving a bad turn to every thing; and, even when these virtuous few do think well both of what is done, and him who does it, they are generally, through suspicion, having been often imposed upon by false appearances cold enough in their commendations.

The rest of the world, as they have little inclination to do good themselves, so they look with an evil eye on him who hath. His good actions reprove their evil ones. They are sometimes even twitted with them, and are forced to hear an odious comparison made between him and themselves. This is with them a sufficient cause of resentment and hatred. They think he hath traduced them by his piety, and fallen foul upon their characters by his justice and charity; for which reason they use all possible means to set him in the worst lights they can, lest he should be thought a better man than themselves. In reality, to be remarkable for going good, is to be an object of envy to all those who do less good, and a reproach to such as do none. A few good actions, indeed, may be forgiven; but if a man should persevere in such practices, the good-natured world will say, he is setting up for something extraordinary; will severely lash at him with their tongues on all occasions;

will rip up all his failings; will add a hundred more he was never addicted to; and persecute him, as often as it is in their power, with the utmost cruelty. This is almost all the glory he is to be rewarded with among men, for doing the best actions, upon the best principles.

But if his motive for doing good appears to be a love of praise (and vanity is never to be concealed from the sharp-sighted world, who always suspect it before it appears), then ridicule and infamy, which he justly deserves, are sure to be his doom. All actions are to be judged of by God according to the real principles they spring from; and men, who often set up for searchers of hearts, as far as they are able, endeavour to judge the same way. The proud man loses all the merit of the little good he does, both with God and man. God sees his heart, and knows he acts on no other principle but vanity; now God hates nothing so much as pride, because it is levelled more directly against himself than any other vice; robs him of his honour; was the spring of all evil and rebellion; is most contrary to his nature, and most inconsistent with the nature of man, whom God, his Maker, knows to be so wicked, so miserable, and so vile, a creature, deserving of nothing but disgrace and shame; with which pride, be it ever so highly gratified here, must be punished at the last.

But the world never suffers it to go unmortified, even in this life, though setting itself off by the most plausible actions. Men of real worth hate the counterfeit of themselves, and can hardly be reconciled to the utmost good that vanity can do. And as to bad men, they serve the vain-glorious apes of goodness, just as the evil spirit served the sons of Sceva: 'The truly good man we know, the upright man we know, but who are ye?' and, flying at their characters, they tear them to pieces. The proud man will not wait to be rewarded either by God or man; but makes his own vanity his pay-master; and, considering how little real good he does, and how high a value he sets on it, I believe he is always overpaid. This kind of hypocrisy and spiritual pride 'brings a man so low,' both in the judgment of God, and the esteem of men, that the vilest publican or sinner, whose breast is smitten with humility, stands far above him in the sight of both.

If it is so idle, now, to glory in our best actions, which we never do but through the borrowed assistance of superior goodness and power, what is it to be vain of our ill ones? What is it to vaunt of successful lewdness, of victories in drinking, of uncommon cunning in bargain-making, of superior policy in managing law-suits, elections, oaths? A mind vain of sin hath arrived to the utmost pitch of depravity; the devil himself can push it no farther; nor can it fall lower, till it takes up its eternal abode with him in utter darkness, the fittest place to hide such an infamous mind in.

The favours of the proud, as they are vouchsafed only to gratify his own vanity, as they are conferred for the most part on the unworthy, and as they are generally granted with a haughty, contemptuous, and disobliging air, seldom meet with a grateful return; and indeed never deserve it; but are often received with some degree of resentment: for those they are conferred on, are, it may be, as proud as their benefactor, and cannot easily bear his insolent bounties or services. The proud owns no obligations; the utmost that can be done for him, is but a small part of what, in his own opinion, he deserves.

There are fools so gross, as to impoverish and ruin themselves, to feed fools almost as senseless as they, merely for the sake of that flattery with which they at once pamper and banter their vanity. These bubbles swell, to take in the nauseous breath of those who blow them up with fulsome praises, till they burst, and fall into nothing. They who catch at the praises of fools, and the flattery of knaves, do but purchase, and that at a ruinous price, the incense of sinks and dunghills. What a stupid, what a low and despicable coxcomb is he, who can bear to be devoured, because he is applauded by the same mouth! 'Pride goes before a fall,' for instance, into contempt; for who will respect the insolent? Or into poverty; for pride can seldom endure either industry or frugality. And then, pride having brought in want, fraud, perjury, or even theft and robbery, must be employed to carry it out again; so that many, to keep themselves in some appearance of their former plenty and splendour, are forced to enlist themselves among the lowest and basest of villains. I have known some gentlemen, of high

blood, and lofty spirits, who did not think it beneath them to cheat, lie, and even steal, to support the dignity of an ancient family.

The proud cares not for the company of his equals, and therefore can never have a friend; for friendship never couples creatures of different species; and such are the very high, and the very low. It is but one and the same pride that makes some men so fond of associating with their inferiors, that they may be always flattered and submitted to; and others, with those above them, that they may appear to the lower part of the world to be persons of eminence, by the company they consort with. To this end they bear with the grossest indignities from the great, that they may appear great to the little, and to the vulgar. They submit, like slaves, to the most scurvy treatment from those above, that, while they hang by them, they may tread with disdain on their equals and inferiors. This is but a pitiful sort of grandeur. It is generally in this class of men that pride begets jealousy and envy, the lowest and basest of its offspring. The envious man hath a great abundance of pride, but not enough to hinder him from perceiving, that others have more merit than himself; and therefore, as he cannot raise himself to a level with them, he uses all his endeavours to pull them down, by detraction, to the low situation of esteem where his own want of worth hath riveted him. He cannot rise; nor can he bear that any one should be above him in the opinion, perhaps, of those, whose esteem, after all, is not worth the having, because they cannot judge.

The proud man cares not for the company of wise men, because they outshine him in conversation. Nay, he is very unwilling to advise with them, unless in cases of extremity, because their judgments overtop his. There is nothing he is so vain of as of his understanding; for which reason, if another happens to advise him to that which he was about to do of himself, he will rather change his measures, than seem in the least to have leaned on the judgment of another. This is an infinite disadvantage to him; because, while the humble hath all the sensible people of his acquaintance to improve by, and to form a council of, the proud is always growing more weak and foolish, by means of the fools he associates with, and assimilates himself to. In such affairs

as are too delicate and difficult for his understanding, he is left entirely to himself, and stands alone; while people too wise or cunning for him, are pushing at him. He walks alone through a path he sees not a single step of; for nothing is so blind as pride. From hence proceed his frequent falls and blunders, which bring on him the ridicule of all who know him: 'Seest thou a man who is wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him; for, thinking himself wise, he becomes foolish;' and falls, of course, into the contempt of every body but himself.

Nothing hinders improvement in knowledge so much as pride. It will not bear conviction; for that is to be outdone. It will not bear information; for you can tell it nothing it did not know before. It neglects useful knowledge, because common; and hunts for strange, for curious, articles of learning, to make a figure with. This sort of pride is called conceit; and is rather troublesome than hurtful, unless in matters of religion, where it does a world of mischief, and is the spring of almost all the heresies and schisms that have ever pestered the church. When two conceited persons happen to fall into a religious dispute, be it about a matter of consequence, or a trifle, about the necessity of revelation, or the length of Paul's cloak, they will so manage it, as to go still farther and farther from truth, and lay the foundation of a bitter and lasting enmity, which all the wisdom and charity of religion shall never be able to reconcile.

The things of the world, that are most apt to tempt us to pride, are, at the same time, the most disposed to mortify it. Some fools are vain of their families; but it is hard to tell for what reason. They cannot glory in the bad actions of their ancestors, and their good ones are but a reproach to their follies and vices. Is it only because they were rich, that their posterity are so vain? If this be the case, why do they not think more highly of him, who is now raising a fortune, than of themselves, who have squandered one away? Although they despise the man who is lately grown rich, because his ancestors were poor; yet their whole compliment is paid to riches, without at all considering whether the fortunes made by their ancestors were not scraped together by the most infamous frauds, and the most cruel op-

pression; which if they were, these men have no better reason to be vain of their families, than the son of a pirate or a robber, who is left in wealthy circumstances by the iniquity of his father. There is no man more despised than he who values himself upon the borrowed honours of his family; for every one knows that he would not be vain of such imputed credit, had he any real worth of his own.

As to riches, there is this of meanness in them, that they are lent by Providence, to those who possess them, as alms are given to beggars; for the rich come into the world, and go out of it, poor and naked; and, if they are covetous, they are more needy than the beggar, who wants but a little. Surely, now, it is not great, to have great wants. There is nothing more senseless, and, of consequence, more despicable, than the vanity of him, who, although he is not six feet high, although his weight may be found by a moderate pair of scales; although his belly may be filled by a few pounds of food in the day, and his back covered by a few yards of cloth; yet takes it into his head to covet all the food, and all the cloth, in the world; and, although he is already master of an inexhaustible fortune, perhaps of a crown, thinks himself hampered in a kingdom, stretching three hundred leagues every way; and therefore to give himself more room, and better supply his necessities, sets himself to acquire all the land in the whole world, to 'add city to city, and land to land, till there be no place.' For this important end, the lives of millions, subjects as well as enemies, are to be sacrificed, and misery and desolation spread over the face of the earth. Considered in this light, every one in his senses would call such a person a madman. But the rest of mankind only call him covetous, or ambitious, because they generally find in themselves the same endless and insatiable desire. Thus it is that the proud possessor of wealth and power falls into extreme necessity; and although master of much, is in miserable distress, because not possessed of all. And what do the covetous and ambitious struggle for? It is only to be greatest in this world, that is, to be uppermost on a dunghill; and, in this pitiful contention, they little care how deeply they flounder in the filth of treachery, perjury, extortion, oppression, rapine, slaughter.

A man, who hath employments and places of honour, meets with great respect from all sorts of people; and of this he is vain. But the compliment of respect is by no means paid to him; for, let these places be taken from him, and given to the vilest of men, and all this respect shall immediately quit the old possessor, and follow the places; by which he may learn, that all the flattery and condescension he was fed with, was only a gross sort of banter upon his pride; and that all the cringes he so vainly took to himself were only so many bows made to the place he stood in. Yet this is not enough to humble him; he is still vain of what he was, vain of the ghost of his departed grandeur, which, when it was at its height, was but the shadow of respect.

Thus do the persons and things of this world conspire to bear down that pride, which they tempt the vain-glorious heart of man to. But there is nothing brings a man so low as want of religion, which turns him into a brute in this world, and a devil in the next. Now pride is the greatest enemy to true religion: 'The proud man careth not for God, neither is God in all his thoughts.' It was pride hindered the Jews from becoming Christians. They expected a temporal Messiah, a mighty emperor of this world, who should make kings and lords of them all. They had given this out every where, and staked the credit of their prophecies on the event. When our Saviour, therefore came, they looked on him with infinite contempt. Even the people about Galilee, who could not be very high in the world, said, 'Is not this the carpenter's son, brought forth in a stable, and laid in a manger?' Don't we know his relations? Are they not among the meanest of the people? It is true, he is descended from David, but David was himself a shepherd before he was a king; and, though his family was afterward ennobled by a succession of kings, yet it hath been long sunk in obscurity and poverty. There hath not been, for some ages, a considerable fortune either in the line of Mary or Joseph. What this man says, therefore, ought to go for nothing. Although he should 'speak as never man spake;' although his wisdom should exceed that of men and angels; although his miracles should testify a more than human power; yet his eloquence is but impertinence;

his wisdom, madness; and his miracles, magic: for what is he, but the son of a carpenter? And what would he persuade us to do? Why, to deny the world, and sink to a level with himself. The rabbis, in the pride of human learning, said to themselves, 'What education had this Jesus of Nazareth? Or upon what improvements do his followers, who are fishermen and tent-makers, set up for preachers and orators? Are they not the most ignorant of men? Shall we submit our minds, cultivated already with the deepest refinements, to the tutorage of such novices as these? Shall they persuade us to renounce our rabbinical wisdom, and sell all we possess, and take up a cross, and follow such a leader?' Thus the Jewish people rejected Christ, because he was not a gentleman; and their doctors despised his religion, because he was not bred at a university; and thus reasons the same sort of people to this day. The worldly-wise, and the conceited philosopher, look on the wisdom of the gospel as foolishness. The great contemn its humble and self-denying spirit. The men of pleasure make a jest of its mortifications. Now, although it hath not for many ages been a disparagement to any man to be a Christian, because so many great men profess themselves such; yet it is generally beneath the great to be Christians in good earnest; insomuch that the little man, who sets up to be somewhat, lays the main stress of his endeavour to distinguish himself from the vulgar, on an affected shew of indifference for religion; poorly apeing, in this, the follies and vices of greater men, because he is unable to imitate them in any thing that is better. Pride never throws a man down so low, as when it makes him an apostate to religion; because from a fall to the depths of infidelity, brutality, and diabolism, there is no rising again. He who thus falls, is for ever sinking deeper, and plunging farther, into vice and infamy, till at last he becomes the outcast of God, and the whole creation, and takes up his final abode in endless misery and shame, with the original author of pride and apostacy.

All this, which is so manifest from experience, is made still more evident by the holy Scriptures; which are full of strong assurances, 'that the crown of pride shall be trod under foot;' that, 'when pride cometh, then cometh shame;' and that 'he who exalteth himself, shall be abased.' There

are also many examples in sacred history, no less terribly threatening pride with a fall, than the afore-mentioned assurances.

Pride changed Lucifer, from the most glorious angel of light, into the most despicable devil.

Pride threw Eve, who hoped, by eating the forbidden fruit, to be made as God, out of paradise, into a world full of misery, shame, and death.

Pride made the sons of Jacob sell their brother; by which they were brought at length to throw themselves down before that object of their envy, in the greatest distress, and most abject fears.

Pride, which would not suffer Saul to enjoy the praises of those who said he slew his thousands, because the same persons said, David slew his ten thousands, pushed him into all manner of impiety and excesses, insomuch that God forsook him, and gave his crown to the man he hated.

Pride brought Haman to hansel that lofty gallows he had erected for a much better man than himself.

Pride caused the good Hezekiah to expose his treasures to the ambassadors of the king of Babylon; which was followed by a sudden denunciation of God's displeasure, and brought the Babylonians to destroy his country.

Pride brought Nebuchadnezzar down from the throne, while the very words of boasting and vanity were yet in his mouth, to eat grass as an ox, and numbered him with the beasts of the field.

Pride lifted up the heart of Belshazzar against the God of heaven; and in that same night he was slain, and his kingdom given to Darius the Median.

Upon a vain confidence in himself, St. Peter was by Almighty God left to himself for a time; and in that time he forswore his Master.

The Pharisee in the temple, who applauded his own righteousness, and vilified the penitent publican, had a very different judgment passed on him by him who said on that occasion, 'Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased.'

What must those disciples of our Saviour have thought of themselves, who, having disputed about superiority, and claimed the privilege of 'sitting at his right hand, and at his left, in the kingdom of heaven,' when they afterward saw

their Divine Master girded with a towel, and washing their feet?

From what hath been said, it is plain, that pride is hateful both to God and man; and that it 'was not made for men,' a very moderate acquaintance with human infirmity is sufficient to convince us; for man, being the offspring of the dust, inherits all the meanness and frailty of his original. 'Why, then, is earth and ashes proud?' There is, indeed, all the reason of the world that it should not; and no one will own that he is; for, although pride proceeds from self-love, yet it is ashamed of itself. Although pride is the cause of impudence, and the proud man is hardly ever ashamed of any thing else, he is nevertheless ashamed of his pride, or rather, cannot be persuaded he hath any; for he who is drunk with pride, is exactly like him who is drunk with strong liquor; he cannot discover his own disorder, but thinks he sees it in every body else, even in the most humble; as the other, in the most sober. Pride, being the excess of self-love and self-esteem, the first and most inward affections of the mind, lies too near the soul to be discerned by it, as the eye-lids are too close to the eye to be seen.

Hence it is more difficult to cure a man of this vice, than of any other; because it is next to impossible to convince him that he is at all subject to it. Besides, as this vice makes a man blind in respect to itself, so it renders him deaf to reproof; insomuch that he who attacks it in the man who loves him most, is sure to raise a high degree of resentment, let his delicacy and address be ever so great; and every one knows how great an obstacle a quarrel may be to the success of any advice that may follow it.

Sensible and thinking minds, however, can perceive some traces of this vice in themselves; and those who are less acute, or less impartial, may be informed by some frank acquaintance, or some reproachful enemy, whether they are looked upon by the world as persons subject to pride. He who is uneasy at the applause or prosperity of his neighbour, or who is often engaged in quarrels, or who cannot bear contradiction, or who is vehement and unconvincible in disputes, or who is pleased with scandal, or who finds himself apt to grow warm upon being reproved, or he who

loves the conversation of those who commend him to his face, may assure himself he is proud; for when pride cannot be seen itself, it may be discovered by its effects.

Those, who have feeling enough to perceive themselves addicted to this diabolical passion, in order to extinguish it, would do well to ask themselves, Whether they are willing to be abased by God, for exalting themselves before men? Whether there is any thing substantial, and really beneficial, in the breath of applause? Whether it is not more difficult to earn the praises of men, than the favour of God? Whether, if they had gained the favourable report of all that know them, they could reasonably hope for the continuance of such a character among persons so fickle, and apt to change. Such persons as are at present basking in the sunshine of applause, would do well to consider the words of our Saviour: 'Woe be to you when all men speak well of you;' on which St. Chrysostom puts this excellent question: 'If, in order to know the goodness of any piece of work, you would choose to advise with a workman skilled in that kind of manufacture; why would you make the multitude judges of your virtue, rather than God? God, who is the author of virtue, knows what it is, and will reward it with eternal glory. But the multitude, who are corrupt and vicious themselves, can neither be sufficient judges nor rewarders of it. For after having slighted the approbation of God, to court the applauses of the crowd, you lose your reward with God; and the crowd that now applauds you, shall soon forget or bespatter you.' This woe, denounced in the text, and thus explained, is in itself a sufficient caution against vain-glory.

But farther: A Christian should consider, that, unless 'the mind be in him that was in Christ Jesus,' he cannot be united to Christ; for whoever is, must be governed by the mind of Christ. Now Christ, who, 'being equal to God, took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient to death, even to the death of the cross,' was a pattern of infinite humility. From an head so meek and lowly, every member swollen with pride must expect to be for ever cut off.

Again: Let the Christian consider, that, unless he wean himself of his pride, he can never expect to be admitted

into the kingdom of heaven, from whence the devil was thrown for that very rebellious passion. He who is admitted into heaven, sees numerous orders and hosts of blessed beings placed above him, and standing nearer the throne of glory than himself. Now were the proud man, who can suffer no one above him, advanced to that happy kingdom, this preference would fill him with such envy and discontent, as could not fail, in respect to him, of turning heaven itself into hell.

But again: Let the proud man, for once, consider what it is he values himself upon, and how very insignificant or minute that real or imaginary advantage is, for which he prefers himself to other men. Perhaps he is, by one small degree, more wealthy, more powerful, or more knowing, than this or that neighbour; and therefore, while he looks downward, is tempted to regard himself as somewhat considerable. But he ought to look upward, that he may learn humility, by comparing himself with those who stand far above him in any of those respects. And, even supposing he can see none above him, and that he is invested with a very extended and absolute power, with imperial wealth, and with the knowledge of a Newton; does he not shrink to almost nothing, when compared with a superior Being? Does he not dwindle, on this comparison, to a beggar, or an idiot? And hath not such a being reason to look on the pride arising from the trifling difference between this man and his inferiors, just as a giant looks on the pride of one dwarf that overtops another by the advantage of an inch in stature, which he gains perhaps by a bit of leather, or a piece of cork, placed under his heel? Does not his pride stoop very low, who suffers himself to be lifted up by a preference so ridiculously insignificant? The pride of man, viewed in this light, betrays, indeed, somewhat extremely abject and contemptible.

Lastly: Let the proud man, if he can, look impartially into himself, and there he will find enough to humble him. It is impossible for that man to be vain-glorious, who knows himself. For 'what is man, whose breath is in his nostrils, whose life is a thin vapour, whose days are swifter than a post, and full of evil;' whose strength is weakness, and his wisdom ignorance and folly? And what hath man that he

did not receive, and must not account for to the owner? All he possesses is borrowed, and must be restored; nay, he does not even belong to himself. Let him give back to God his natural talents, his beauty, his strength, his riches, his worldly pomp and power; let him restore to men the little knowledge he received by instruction; let him render to the beasts his cloathing, to the worms his finery, to the earth and the dunghill his delicacies, to the rocks his shining stones; and what is left? An ignorant and vicious mind, a naked and starving body, a wretch, precarious, dependant, infirm, and helpless; whom any beast, nay, the smallest insect, or a blast of wind, can destroy; who feeds on dirt, and subsists on a momentary supply of air. Shall we call him ashes, or dust, or smoke, or dirt? This, as St. Chrysostom observes, will only represent his vileness and infirmity; but, to paint that, and his swelling vanity too, let us say he is a bubble, puffed up with the wind of other bubbles, which with difficulty he contains for a while in a frail bladder of water; and, being tossed to and fro on the tide of life, soon vanishes, and is seen no more.

Come down, vain man, from the throne which thy vanity and thy flatterers have erected for thee in thy own imagination, and behold thyself springing from the dust, and borrowing all thou art so highly vain of from the same original. Behold thy heart polluted and enslaved by mean appetites, and brutal passions; and thy boasted reason imposed on by slight appearances, hoodwinked with childish ignorance, and misled by shameful errors. Behold thy body subject to accidents, afflicted with sickness, and destroyed by death, which stands at thy side, waiting for the signal to strike thee down. But, above all, remember thy sins, thy many open and secret sins, and behold thyself led by them, like a slave, far from thy known happiness, through a course of life condemned by thy own reason and conscience to endless disgrace and misery. Behold this picture of thyself; consider it attentively; and then tell us, canst thou be proud? No, surely; it is impossible: And therefore,

'Not unto man, O Lord, not unto man, but unto thy holy and glorious name,' be ascribed all honour, and dignity, and majesty, for ever. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXXVII.

THE DIGNITY OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

Preached at a Visitation in 1751.

ST. MARK x. 43, 44.

Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister;
And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.

FEW subjects beter deserve the attention of a true believer (and to such only I speak in this Discourse) than the dignity of the Christian ministry. It is true, it concerns us above all things to think attentively, in order that we may think rightly, on the fundamental principles of our religion. But, as those principles are conveyed to us through the clergy, we see they generally partake of that esteem or contempt, wherewith the clergy are regarded.

Hence it comes to pass, that the opinions people entertain of their teachers do very materially assist, or obstruct, their own edification; unhappily for the most part obstruct it, sometimes by sweetening the errors of a favourite teacher; but infinitely oftener by imbittering the truth in the ears of such as are forced to hear it from persons they do not like.

It were to be wished, indeed, that all men could think of our religion, as it is in itself, invariably wise, holy, and awful; without attending, so much as they do, to the good or ill qualities of its preachers, which have little more connexion with its truth or falsity, than the good or ill qualities of other Christians. But that the case is otherwise, in fact, daily experience may convince us. It will by no means content the world, that we appear to be properly commissioned, unless they have reason also to think us duly qualified. Whatsoever degree of respect, or disrespect, they may entertain for our pretensions to Scriptural institution, if they hold our understandings and morals in esteem, they will listen to us; if in contempt, they will turn a deaf ear to all we can say; for they know, as well as we do, that the bulk

of what we say to them, being the produce of our own minds, may, according to the degree of our honesty, and of our ability in the Scriptures, be more or less agreeable to the mind of God. If therefore the Clergy are respected, they will be heard, not otherwise.

Now, pursuant to what hath been premised, the respect paid to them, so far as piety is permitted to interfere in the matter, will be in proportion to the character they appear to be invested with in the holy Scripture; and so far as their hearers are governed by observation, or experience, according to the character they give themselves by the moral part of their behaviour, and by the discharge of that sacred office they assume.

And first, as to the ministerial character setforth in holy Scripture, it is expressed in terms, that intimate, as you may observe, an equal degree of humility and dignity. 'Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister, and whosoever will be chiefest, shall be servant of all.' Here is plainly signified a certain dignity and pre-eminence of some, who are to be greater than others, and chief among their bretheren; and yet, at the same time, with this dignity is joined a proportionable humility, on which the very dignity is founded; for, in order to his future exaltation, the messenger of Christ must humble himself here; must of himself take the lowest seat, before his Master will promote him to one that is higher; must make himself little and inconsiderable in one respect, in order to be great and chief in another; that is, the higher he is advanced in spiritual, the more regardless he ought to be of mere worldly pre-eminence; for the same reason, perhaps, that a king thinks that precedency not worth his claiming, which the lowest of mankind yields to him, who is but one degree above him. Indeed he who hath ever tasted that internal grandeur, which springs from the consciousness of real worth, of religious honours, will have little relish for outward pomp and parade; his soul will soar above it, to the dignity of Christian humility. Thus we see, in these words of our Saviour, that we must all be servants one to another; and that, in order to gratify the highest ambition we are permitted to entertain.

If all the passages of Scripture, relating to the dignity of our function, are fairly weighed and compared together,

none will be found to do us more honour, than those in which we are stiled 'the servants of Christ;' and yet none more strongly inculcate the humility essential to that function; for even our Master 'took on him the form of a servant,' and 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.' To minister to whom? Why, to the soul of the very meanest man, that should believe on him. Accordingly, what can be more humble, what more ministerial, than the carriage of this exalted Being? This 'King of kings,' submits himself, not only to the majesty of his Father, but 'to every ordinance of man.' This 'Lord of lords girds himself with a towel, and washes the feet of his disciples.' This Creator of all things, this Ruler of heaven, is contented to be 'spit on, buffeted, crucified.' And in all this recommends his example to us his servants, with a reason, which all the evasions of pride can never parry; 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord; neither he that is sent, greater than he that sent him. If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you.'

With such an example, set us by the Son of God himself, set us, who are but dust and ashes, we must be lost to common sense, and common modesty, if we presume to carry ourselves above either the humblest duty of our office, or the meanest mortal to whom that duty may be due.

But, since the office of the clergy appears to be set so low in holy Scripture, it may now be asked, wherein the dignity of that office consists, as set forth by the same Scripture?

The dignity of this sacred office is represented to us in terms so strong, and in a stile so high, by the holy Spirit, that, were not the words dictated by that very Spirit, and did not the necessity of the thing press me to it, as I am unworthily vested with that awful office myself, I should choose, conscious of my own miserable unfitness for so holy a function, to be silent on a subject, much fitter for the minds of the laity, than the mouths of the clergy. However, before I have done with it, I hope to set it in such a light, as may induce my brethren and myself to draw arguments for humility, nay, for fear and trembling, rather than for pride and presumption, from that very dignity.

So necessary is the ministry to the propagation of Christian knowledge, and, by that means, to the reformation

and eternal happiness of mankind, that our blessed Saviour himself calls those, who are honoured with it, 'the salt of the earth,' without which it must become corrupt and fetid before God; and 'the light of the world,' without which it must still sit in darkness, in the darkness of idolatry and wickedness. Let a Christian (I speak to the reason, the faith, the conscience of a real Christian), ask himself, how he can hold those in contempt, whom his Saviour emblazons with so noble a coat, and not remember, at the same time, the other words of our Saviour, 'He that despises you, despises me; and he that despises me, despises him that sent me.'

Again, the clergy are in holy Scripture called 'shepherds,' the shepherds to whose care 'that flock is committed, which God hath purchased with his own blood.'

Again, they are called 'teachers,' teachers of heavenly wisdom, and saving righteousness, to a people, who, if destitute of such instructors, must spend their days in shameful ignorance, and horrible wickedness; and die at last 'like the beast that perisheth.'

Again, they are called 'stewards, stewards of the manifold grace, and the mysteries of God;' without whose intervention, as Christ hath pleased to constitute his church, neither the Spirit of God, nor the seal of the covenant, administered in the holy sacrament, can be conveyed to any man; 'for no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God.'

And to raise their character still higher, they are dignified with the title of Christ's apostles, and even with that of ambassadors and angels from the high God, who speaks to the people by their mouths, who washes away their sins, and holds forth the precious body and blood of his Son, by their hands.

If, from the Scriptural characters, we descend to the execution of their office in its various branches, we shall be struck with a most exalted idea both of its beauty and dignity.

What reverence is due to those, who faithfully deliver, and ably defend, that word, of which its great Author says, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.'

How tenderly ought they to be loved! how highly ought

they to be respected! who with the requisite discretion, administer absolution to the penitent, and in the bowels of Christian charity, apply the other consolations of the gospel, to such as, through a deep sense of their sins, dare hardly hope for the promised mercy; to such as welter in the tortures of a sick bed; to such as hang in the agonies of death, between heaven and hell, and do not of themselves know how to support their spirits, or guide their steps, through the dark and dreadful passage!

With what veneration ought we to look up to those, who, without respect of persons, humble the proud and stubborn with the terrors of the Lord, and brandish the awful thunders of his word, against the dignified vices of the great! How are they to be esteemed by, not only every Christian, but every worthy son of his country, every friend to civil society, who reform the vicious, who confirm the virtuous, who, in the name of God, and by the power of true religion, labour to strengthen the foundations of civil government, that cannot stand but on religion; and who spend their days, and, if they are truly the ministers of Christ, would lay down their lives, for that important cause, on which absolutely depends all that is of any importance to mankind here, or hereafter.

So greatly important is the religion we preach, and, of consequence, so highly honourable is the office of preaching it: for we preach that religion (let the world hear, and the clergy fear) for which man was made, for which so many miracles were wrought, for which the Red Sea was divided, and mount Sinai cloathed with fire and thunder; for which the sick were healed, the dead raised, the devils ejected; that religion, for which the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, laboured and suffered; for which the Son of God descended from the throne of heaven, took on him the nature of man, was persecuted, buffeted, spit on, ridiculed—for which he died.

If to preach such a religion as this, be not a work of high honour and dignity, then surely there is no dignity, not to say in the kingdoms of this world, but even in the celestial principalities, promised to the righteous. If there is no honour in such a charge as this, then may the robes and ensigns of royalty look dim, and the thrones and sceptres of

kings hide themselves in obscurity; for this world is nothing, heaven itself is nothing.

After what hath been said, it may be asked, how so much grandeur is to be reconciled with so much lowliness, in the same person, and with respect to the same office.

Christ hath already answered the question; for he said, 'My kingdom is not of this world.' As his ministers derive all their dignity from him, and from the station they hold in his kingdom, which is purely spiritual, so their dignity is only spiritual. Now, with the highest pitch of this dignity, the utmost lowliness is surely as consistent, as the infinite majesty of our Saviour's person was with the unexampled humility of all his carriage. Perhaps it may be truly said, that, to a discerning eye, he never appeared among men in higher glory, than when he washed the feet of his disciples. The keys of heaven and hell were in those hands, that performed this lowest office of a servant. At least, I will venture to assert, that the highest minister of his church appears with more real dignity, when he enters a cottage to dispense his alms both to the soul and body of a beggar, than when he shews himself in the utmost splendor of his office on the episcopal throne. In this the envious, at least, will think he assumes; which hath in it the littleness of vanity; whereas, in that, every one must see he condescends; and condescension supposes as much grandeur, as it demonstrates humility.

With whatsoever outward magnificence the state, in its piety and prudence, may have thought fit to invest the character of a minister, he should, however, remember the true, the genuine dignity of his function; and should be above stooping to so mean a pride, as that of assuming, on account or the bells and fringes hung on him by this wretched world; which, after all the compliment of these external things, always looks with a jealous, often with a contemptuous eye on him, who seems to value himself on account of these inviduous, these interfering honours. Let him, therefore, despise the frippery of worldly grandeur, and stand as high as he pleases on that grandeur of his calling, which his Master allows him. Here mankind will be ready to yield him all the respect he hath a right to claim; provided he confines himself to this, and willingly resigns to the world

its own proper pomps and vanities, which he renounced when he was baptized.

By this I do not mean, that religion should be stripped of all exterior ornament, or, that they who preside in its sacred offices should appear in a slovenly meanness, but that this kind of pomp should be evidently so applied, as to add a dignity rather to the office itself, than to the persons of those who fill it. This foreign grandeur is no sooner detached from the function to the man, than it excites envy, instead of respect, and disdain, instead of veneration.

The seeming deference paid even to the more exalted part of the clergy (so much of it at least as is attracted by outward shew and figure), is as outward, is as superficial, to the full, as that to which it is paid. It is but the mere vizard of respect; and even when there is any thing of reality under it, sure I am, Christ and his religion have no share of it. And yet, as matters go, and (I am sorry to say it) are likely to go, this compliment sort of respect is all we have got, in the place of that pious veneration, which a sincere Christian never fails to entertain for a good clergyman.

If it is asked now, by what means we may recover a more solid and useful respect; I answer (and truth itself shall be my voucher) that, in case we have sense and goodness (I had almost said ambition) enough to seek our honour, where the nature of our employment fixes it, the way lies straight before us; we are to have recourse, in the first place, to a thorough reformation of whatsoever is amiss in our morals; and then, to those means, which, when united and patronized by a good example, ever were, and ever must be attended with success. Of these means I shall only insist on a few; for which, at present, there seems to be a more than ordinary call.

The first is natural capacity, and a thorough knowledge of the Christian religion. He who, without these, sets up for a teacher, must at least have a large stock of assurance to bear him out; for, at every turn, they who know him will be pointing at him and his flock, that keen expression of our Saviour, 'If the blind lead the blind, they shall both fall into the ditch.' Although a plain man may, in a few hours, learn enough of Christianity to regulate his life, and save his soul; yet a minister of the gospel, who is to be attacked

by numberless opposers, to be fitted on all questions, to speak to all capacities, and encounter with all tempers, must have strong talents, must be well read in the original languages, must be mighty in the Scriptures, must be familiar with the Fathers, and the more eminent modern divines. If he hath not these accomplishments, he cannot instruct precisely, he cannot reason convincingly, he cannot exhort, or rebuke, powerfully. Now, that clergyman, who is unable to do these things, gives the religion he preaches a most contemptible appearance of weakness and folly in his mouth.

Besides, there are certain more exterior accomplishments, almost as necessary to the dignity of our office, while we instruct or persuade, as learning itself. When we advise, exhort, persuade, or reprove, in private, is there not a great degreee of address necessary, in order to make what we say as soothing, and yet as respectable, as possible? Does he not give the judicious a high idea of himself, and consequently of his office, who probes the heart to the bottom; yet with such delicacy as not to hurt? Or, when hurting cannot be avoided, makes it evident he is so hurt himself, that his freedom cannot be resented? Or, when it is resented with injurious and reproachful returns, preserves an unruffled superiority of mind?

Again, in reading divine service, in order to do justice to the best liturgy any church was ever blessed with, and to preserve the dignity of so sacred an office, the voice, the face, the posture of the whole body, should express a deep solemnity, and a lively piety. The only secret of doing this is, so to frame the heart before we begin, as to forget we are ridding ourselves of a formal task, or uttering the devotions of others, that all the attention of our minds, and all the ardour of our hearts, being collected and concentered in the awful object, we may pray like sinners who solicit for the joys of heaven, and return thanks with that emotion of soul, which ought to be felt by him, who hath received, or believes he shall receive what he hath prayed for. If we perform this duty well in regard to ourselves, as Christians, we cannot fail, as clergymen, of perfection and dignity, in regard to the congregation.

When we go into the pulpit, we should remember that a

sermon is a meal, to which few people bring a keen appetite; and therefore should not think it enough to furnish the congregation with the wholesome food of sound doctrines and solid reasonings, unless we also spice that food with sentiments the most affecting, and garnish it with expressions the most striking, that may be had. Nor is this all; what we say must lose its whole effect, though never so well prepared, if it be not enforced in the delivery, with that solemn emphasis of voice, face, and gesture, which becomes him who speaks in earnest, who speaks from God to his people. Is it not a shame to hear the right to a cow, a sheep, or some paltry property contended for at the bar, with more eloquence and dignity, than the highest points of faith and practice are honoured with in the pulpit? He who contents himself with stupidly drawling out, or hastily chattering to his hearers, a little finical affected essay, instead of a weighty discourse, is but a sorry hireling, who, having the wages, not the work, in view, cares not how despicable the holy office may appear in his performance.

The next means I shall take notice of, as necessary to revive the spirit of Christianity, and at the same time to restore the dignity of the ministry, is a strict fidelity in those who fill it. We know, 'it is required of stewards, that a man shall be found faithful.' Now, we having an infinitely more important trust committed to us, than any other kind of stewards, inasmuch as we are 'the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the manifold grace and mysteries of God;' and, being accountable to an all-knowing Master, it behoves us, more than all others, to make the utmost advantage of our talents, that, when he calls us to account for them, we may receive the reward 'of good and faithful servants.' Can any thing set a man so low in the eyes of the world, as a manifest want of common honesty? And can this want ever appear in so base, so scandalous a light, as in relation to a trust like ours; wherein the things trusted are the great truths of God, and the souls of men; and he who trusts, is the infinitely just and almighty God? Or, on the other hand, is there any thing so likely to raise us to the esteem of men, as faithful dealing between God and his people?

Now, let us not presume to say we are faithful, if we are not zealous for the truth, and for the success of that truth,

in the salvation of our respective flocks. A honest heart is always warm; and surely if there is any warmth in the heart, it cannot be cool in such a cause, in the cause of God, of truth, and of man's eternal happiness. Did Christ die for the souls of men? Did he trust those souls, thus purchased with his precious blood, to our care? And can we say, we are faithful, if we are remiss or indifferent under so great a charge? Let us consider our Master, our work, and our reward; and we shall quickly perceive, that, if we want zeal and ardour in such a service, we must be scandalous traitors, traitors odious in the eyes of God, and despicable in those of men.

Again, we cannot say, we are either faithful or zealous, if we are not diligent, if we take our ease, and suffer the sheep of Christ to live and die, as ignorant of him and his religion, as the Cafres or Greenlanders. What a faithless, what an ungrateful, what a stony-hearted wretch is he, who sees God's people perishing for lack of knowledge, and, contenting himself with a pitiful system of mere legal duties, forgets the precept of St. Paul to Timothy, 'I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. Watch then in all things; endure afflictions; do the work of an evangelist; make full proof of thy ministry.' Is there nothing here but a cold irreverent reading of prayers, a rambling over a stupid harangue once a week, or now and then christening a child, and burying a corpse? What, in the name of God, and of common decency, must our lay brethren think of us, if they see us going to a canon, or an act of parliament, and not to the word of God, and the nature of our office, for the rules of our duty?

But farther: Let us not presume to say, we have the least mite, either of fidelity or zeal, if we do not, in such parts of our office, as require it, demonstrate a clear courage, and an undaunted resolution. Shall a poor soldier, in the service of a worldly prince and cause, and for a few pence by the day, stand the fire of fifty thousand men? And shall the soldier of Christ, with 'the two-edged sword of God's word' in his hand, by which the cause of God and heaven

is to be maintained, with plentiful pay in this world, and with a crown of endless glory in view, fear to attack error in the midst of its numerous bigots, or vice in its highest pomp and power? How dare he be a coward, who hath an almighty arm to back him? There is not a baser wretch than he, who, because the times are loose and libertine, because it is the fashion to cant up new opinions, instead of ancient truths, is afraid to insist on his creed. His poor stammering tongue is ever employed in mincing what ought to be swallowed whole, and in dodging miserably between truth and falsehood. His cloven tongue is very different from that which rested on the apostles; it is not of fire, but of ice; it is also very differently employed; for, while one half of it whispers truth in this company, the other prattles heresy in that; and both together deliver from the pulpit (what shall I call it!) an artfully qualified truth, or a guarded heresy, or an ambiguous mixture of both, with a dose of poison for the ignorant, and a cunning salvo for the orthodox hearer. Now this the fool takes for prudence, as if none were to hear him but men! 'Woe be to the fearful hearts, and faint hands, and the sinner that goeth two ways; for it will be more tolerable, in the day of judgment, for that other fool, who saith in his heart, there is no God, than for him.'

Of all the qualities requisite in a good clergyman, there is not one that tends so directly to aggrandize the character of his function, as this of a honest courage. If, like his great Master, without partiality, without hypocrisy, without fear or respect of persons, he speaks out freely, reproves vice boldly, and shews he is awed by nothing, but the dread of failing in his duty, his person will soon be revered, and his ministry appear majestic, in the eyes of all who know him; although his poverty should render the attainment of this desireable end somewhat more tardy in him, than in one whose temporalities set him higher in the world.

There cannot be a grosser mistake, than the common notion, that prevails too much both among the laity and clergy, that a clergyman is to speak with freedom and resolution, only proportionable to his rank and fortune. What, do you give the lie to Christ? 'Is Christ's kingdom of this world?' Or do his ministers, as such, derive their authority

of speaking from any but him? Do they derive it from mammon, that enemy of Christ and his religion? I will venture to say, the dignity of the ministry will never be retrieved, till it ceases to be put on a worldly footing, and is founded again in Christ; 'for other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.'

Again, a clergyman can in nothing demonstrate a greater dignity of soul, nor a more exalted spirit, than by a settled contempt of that, which the rest of mankind are so miserably enslaved to; I mean, the riches and honours of the world. But if, while he preaches up things above, his affections appear to be nevertheless riveted to things below, he gives but a sorry proof of his fidelity to Christ, and his zeal for the honour of a function, so properly, so purely spiritual. If all the ardour of his heart is exhausted in hunting after preferment, and doubling on the scent of worldly interests, let us not blame the laity for calling him a renegade and a deserter from Christ. If we believe our blessed Saviour, we must be satisfied, 'No man can serve two masters;' and, if we believe our own eyes, we must be convinced, this man is serving mammon, and therefore cannot be serving Christ; who hath assured us, 'No man can serve God and mammon.' What a light does he set himself in to all men, and even his holy function to the undistinguishing, who thus, like another Judas, sells his master to a new cross, for some pieces of silver.

In the next place, that such men only may be admitted into the ministry, as are qualified to advance its credit, all possible care should be taken to examine into the piety, the virtue, the learning, of those who stand candidates for holy orders; that none but chosen men may be ordained; and that the church may no longer be a sink and a receptacle for wretches, every way too contemptible to do honour to any other employment. What account shall they give at the last day, who are more nice in the choice of their own, than of God's servants.

And the better to answer the intention of this care, as soon as these men are ordained and employed, their conduct ought to be closely inspected, that the good only may be advanced, and the worthless kept down, or discarded. By

this management, the work of the ministry will be soon brought into able and honourable hands, the clamours of our enemies silenced, and the credit of our holy function restored to its primitive dignity. But, without this, I will be bold to say, no art, no policy, no power of this world will be able to prevent our tumbling headlong into a still greater degree of contempt.

Lastly, in order to restore the dignity of our employment, and, with it, the credit of Christianity itself, union or uniformity is absolutely necessary. But here I mean not uniformity in the common acceptation, as applied to ceremonies, and the constitutions of particular churches. No; more dangerous and more pernicious differences, than such as end in schism, bad as they are, call for our attention. We need no longer shew a concern to see Christ's seamless garment divided, when our eyes are summoned to a more rueful spectacle, to see his very body torn in pieces, and that by such means—O that it were possible to speak of them with any tenderness towards those who use them, and yet at the same time not to forget, that Christ is thereby crucified afresh!

There are those among us (may God avert the dreadful evil) who begin to lay new foundations; who, although as yet a little covertly, indeed, insinuate a set of doctrines diametrically repugnant to others, that have been hitherto esteemed, by all the churches, most necessary and sacred. Hence it comes, that while one preaches up the doctrine of the Trinity, another denies it; while one insists on the atonement made in the death of Christ for the sins of all men, another calls us off, and bids us trust in our own righteousness for our eternal salvation; while one bids us pray for, and rely on, the assistance of God's grace, in order to faith and reformation, another bids us lean entirely to our own strength for both; while one frightens us with the menaces of eternal torments for our unrepented sins, another sooths us with assurances, that our punishments shall be only temporary.

What shall our unhappy hearers do in this dilemma? Shall they follow him who leads to the south? Or him who beckons them to the north? Or shall their faith waver in

suspence, till obstinacy becomes pliant, and conceit blushes for its own ignorance; or till they themselves become better casuists than their teachers?

But the abettors of new opinions will say, what would you have us do? Is it possible for all men to think one way? We must follow our own reason, not yours; and if superior reason leads us to principles contrary to yours, or not universally believed in former times, you have no right to condemn us for publishing such principles, as truths, since you carry the importance of those principles, whether embraced, or rejected, farther than we do.

'Why, herein now is a most marvelous thing!' that we should disagree about such matters, as of all things ought to be most plain, and which the Spirit of God judged he had made sufficiently plain; or he would never, by St. Paul, have told us, that 'there is but one faith; commanding us to stand fast in that faith, to stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;' he would never so pathetically have 'besought us, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we should all speak the same thing, that there should be no divisions among us; but that we should be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.' Shall a Christian, after hearing these words of God, still insist, that there is nothing in which all men can judge alike? Or, at least, that points, essentially related to the very object of our worship, to the very foundation of our hopes, are so obscurely set forth in holy Scripture, as to leave room for sensible and honest men to differ so widely about them?

If it is fundamentally necessary to think rightly on these points, they must be clearly revealed, or revelation must have somewhat in it very foolish and defective. If they are not necessary, if they are not fundamental, then, in whatsoever establishment the one side or the other shall happen to be embraced, it is better for those, who look on them as unnecessary, and who cannot, merely by their private judgment in expounding Scripture, digest the determinations of that establishment, either honestly to stay out of it, or modestly to distrust their own understandings, and to acquiesce in that of the church, than to destroy its peace by vending contrary opinions; for peace is as confessedly

necessary, and charity as confessedly fundamental, as the commands of God can make them.

If, on this occasion, these men declare, they have no rancour nor spleen against those with whom they differ; and that they cannot see, why Christians should hate one another, merely because they are unable to pursue one track of thinking in matters so mysterious and speculative, as they are pleased to call them; they will in vain attempt to excuse themselves by such a declaration, while they contend with as much heat, perhaps, I might say, with at least as much bitterness, as their opponents, for their own favourite opinions. On a careful examination of their own hearts, and an impartial review of their past conduct, it is to be feared, they will find them far enough from that humility and moderation they cry out for in their adversaries. But, be it as it will with themselves, they cannot be so ignorant of human nature, as not to know, that religious disputes, although concerning matters never so trifling in themselves, have ever been, and, till men become indifferent to all religion, will ever be, attended with uncharitable animosities. Since, therefore (if we believe themselves), they prefer benevolence and charity to every thing else, they ought not surely to throw a needless bone of contention among their brethren, who may happen not to be blessed with so much temper as they are, nor with so much sense as to see, that opinions, for the sake of which men of so great learning think fit to disturb the repose of their own church, are, after all, far from being essentials in the judgment of those very men.

But even granting, that the Scriptures, in prescribing the unanimity just now contended for, had therein required of us a thing unreasonable or impossible; or, that the unanimity prescribed relates to other points, than those about which we are divided; yet this will be no excuse for men, who, when they were ordained, and when they were instituted, and again when they were inducted into their livings, did most solemnly subscribe, and declare their unfeigned assent and consent, to certain principles of great importance; and also solemnly promise to teach those principles, and no other; which principles they now, nevertheless, without either renouncing their orders, or resigning their livings, do

to the uttermost of their power oppose. Nay, what is worse than all this, after having thus opposed the principles they so solemnly engaged to defend, these men, we see, are ready, as often as tempted by a new benefice, again solemnly to declare, in the face of God, and the congregation, for the very same principles; yet (astonishing!), as soon as they are in, set themselves to run them down again without a single blush! and, instead of these, for which the word of God himself is voucher, to cant up the feeble, the affected philosophy of others, or new-fangled nonsense of their own. 'Woe unto us if we preach not the gospel;' or rather, double woe unto us, if we preach any thing else for gospel; if we turn moralists, instead of apostles, and conceitedly preach up ourselves, or Cicero, or Seneca, or (pardon me for naming them with these illustrious heathens) if we preach up Shaftesbury, or Hutcheson, or Chubb, in the place of Christ and Scripture; whereas we ought 'to know nothing among the brethren, but Christ, and him crucified.'

And are these the men, thus, through love of the world, declaring for one thing, and, through conceit and self-sufficiency, insisting on quite the contrary, who are ever telling us, that our articles of faith are of little consequence? and that good works, sincerity, and moral righteousness, give the only title to salvation? Is it thus they exemplify, to a criticising world, their own applauded morality? Is theirs the very sincerity, that is to stand for all religion and virtue, and which renders them so highly meritorious, as to need no atonement, no imputed righteousnes? O thou God of truth! who cannot look on iniquity, is this the righteousness that will justify in thy sight? O thou guileless Lamb of our salvation! Is this the infantine simplicity, that is to recommend us to thy embraces, and make us the children of God? Would to God I could have done justice to my subject, without touching on a topic, that wounds the very vitals of Christianity, that throws infamy on the ministry, that pierces every honest Christian to the soul, as often as he thinks of it, with a mixture of shame, terror, and indignation!

But bear with my infirmity, my dear brethren, and give me leave to shut up this already too tedious discourse, with

two reflections, which, I humbly apprehend, may be of singular use to us of the ministry, if seriously laid to heart.

First: Let us awfully consider whom it is we have undertaken to serve, and wherein we propose, to serve him; how arduous our duty; how glorious the reward to be hoped for, if we discharge it as our Master requires; and how dreadful the punishment to be feared, if we materially fail therein. If the best clergyman in the world lays this home to his heart, as feelingly as the dignity of the subject demands, it will shake his soul within him. His modesty will perhaps be more ready to suggest the punishment to his fears, than his vanity the reward to his hopes. What then must we suppose the unworthy clergyman ought to feel, could he sum up thought enough for the alarming reflection. God be merciful to me! I feel it too sensibly myself to be able to dwell on it any longer.

What I have said concerning the dignity of our employment, was chiefly in order to give us an high idea of that, and an humble one of ourselves, and our qualifications, when compared to a post of such transcendent trust and importance.

The meanest artificer stands as high as he can on the honour of his particular calling; and, if he hath any sense, he knows the best, or rather, the only way to procure it honour, is to fill it with skill and integrity. And shall not a clergyman, whose calling is in all respects so sacred, give proofs of a like sensible zeal for its credit, and take the same method to honour it himself, and to render it respectable in the estimation of others? But when the ignorant, the slothful, or the vicious, takes this office on him, does he not despise it himself, and teach others to do the same, inasmuch as he thinks a wretch like him is good enough for it? Does he not treat it with more contempt than the layman, who calls it priestcraft; since, in the very literal sense of the word, he actually makes a craft of it, and a most iniquitous craft too; for, so he can devour the temporal good things of his flock, he cares not whether they taste of spiritual good things from him, or not.

And, after all, does he stupidly look for respect on account of a profession, to which he is a scandal? It ought

to be laid dowu as a maxim, applicable to all employments, but more especially to that of a clergyman, that the post should impart only so much reputation to the man, as he is qualified to reflect on it. Indeed this is practically received by all the wiser part of the world. We do not honour an officer, although he struts in scarlet, and wears a sword, if we know him to be a coward; or, if we do, it must be owned that, when such are honoured, the commission is vilified; for it is supposed, the base and timorous are fit enough to bear it. In like manner, we must either despise the office of a clergyman, as too many do, for the unworthiness of him who fills it; or we must look with more contempt on him for presuming to undertake so sacred a charge, than we should have done, had we seen him in the light of a dishonest tradesman, or an unskilful ploughman.

The other reflection is, that we do not want encouragement, even from men, to hope for a retrieval of our honour, if we are not altogether wanting to ourselves. Things are at such a pass (we should be stung to the heart with the reproachful truth) that a clergyman who does but the third part of his duty, and is but half as exemplary as he ought to be (so glad are our people to see us aim at diligence) is sure to be applauded, and almost compared to the primitive apostles and fathers. While he hath but too much reason to fear the vengeance of God for the far greater part of his duty, which he neglects, he hears himself (O shameful honour!) exalted to the stars by men, for the little he performs.

This, notwithstanding, I shall readily own, there are those, who, from various motives, too invidious, and too tedious to be detailed, will be sure to throw on us all the contempt and odium they possibly can, let our carriage be never so prudent, never so apostolical; nay, who will be very sorry to see us behave ourselves as we ought to do; because that will deprive them of the only topic they know how to be witty on, of their strongest argument against our religion; and, what must be still more vexatious, will revive the influence of that religion, which they hate, and which they had hopes of banishing out of the world.

These men, however, cannot yet (God be praised) boast a majority among the people; so that a proper conduct in us, joined to the candour of a far greater number, will soon

stifle the then ill-grounded insinuations, and manifestly malicious railleries, of such men.

To conclude: It is in vain to hope for a retrieval of our dignity, or a revival of Christian piety, which must always go together, without one and all, or generally, at least, betaking ourselves to the measures recommended. God will assist and bless no other; and if we put our trust in mere prudential or political schemes, those he will blast and curse.

Let us, therefore, in the name of our Almighty Master, do our utmost, honestly 'to approve ourselves in all things as the ministers of God;' and then, and only then, may we reasonably hope our people will, with affection and esteem, 'think of us, as they ought to think of the ministers of Christ, and the stewards of the mysteries of God.'

And now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, 'unto him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end.' Amen.

DISCOURSE XXXVIII.

THE RELIGIOUS DUTY OF PARENTS AND MASTERS ENFORCED.

JOSHUA XXIV. 15

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

THOUGH the office, in which the master of a family is placed, does not usually give him authority over many persons, yet it is a post of great importance and trust. The head of this little society has a more absolute power, and exercises it more personally and immediately upon his subjects, than that of any other. The number of those, over whom he is set, is, by the nature of things, generally determined to a

few; because it would be impossible for one man to make such provision, to give such instructions, and employ such a degree of care over many, as the ends and purposes of a family require. The master of a family is not only to provide the necessaries and conveniences of life for his children and servants; but on his instructions, his example, and his care, depend, in a great measure, their virtue, their honour, and happiness here, and their eternal salvation hereafter.

The power of the magistrate operates upon private families at a distance, and only on their outward actions. The public precepts and exhortations of the pastor are general, and his private ones can be applied to particular persons only at certain times; and then too under the disadvantage of an imperfect knowledge, as to their tempers and wants. But the master of a family, living in one house with those under him, and being always among them, cannot but know what instructions their ignorance, what restraints their vices, and what management their dispositions, require. Nor does he want a power, proportionable to his knowledge, to support and enforce the proper methods of nurture and government. His children and servants have, under God, scarce anydependence, but on him. He can encourage, or correct; can dispense pleasure or pain among them, as he pleases. This cannot but give him all that weight and authority, which are necessary to the great ends of his office.

In the next place, his influence commences at that very time, when the subjects, on which it is to work, are the best disposed to be wrought on, and to receive impressions. He has tender and flexible materials under his hands, and such as are then capable of any forms he is pleased to give them. They have, it is true, a certain bias to evil; but this calls upon him for the greater vigilance and industry, in prepossessing them with the principles of virtue. If they, through his neglect or mismanagement, should miss the opportunity of being duly instructed in the principles of religion, and trained up to an habitual course of piety and virtue, they come forth into the world only qualified to create mischiefs and disturbance to their country, and to bring infamy and distress on themselves; and, at last, go out into another life with a load of sin about them, sufficient to sink them in misery, as lasting as their immortal souls.

If the mind be not seasonably plied with good principles, and steadily disciplined to virtue, in time, it will find out wicked principles, and bad habits, for itself. To root out these, after they have spread, and struck deep into the soil, will be almost impossible in manhood or old age. I believe there can be few instances given of ill-livers, who, having been much neglected in their youth, were ever reclaimed afterwards.

If the influence, which the master has in a family, be not applied to the good ends and purposes for which it was intended, it cannot but promote the contrary ends. The authority, that sets him above his children and servants, makes him a pattern to them, and his actions a rule for theirs. If he does not seem to fear God, or to worship him with devotion, neither will they; and, when they come to have houses and families of their own, they will be too apt to think they have done very well, if they do as he did. So ignorance, and neglect of God's worship, beginning at him, will spread from family to family, will go down from generation to generation, making infidels, and damning souls, for ought he knows, to the end of the world. Now can a man answer it to his own conscience, his posterity, or his God, that he has perverted the power given him by divine providence and nature, for the great purposes of instructing his charge, and training them up to devotion; and employed the whole force of it, in propagating the infection of his own evil example among his miserable posterity, and that of his unhappy servants?

It is not easy to conceive, how masters of families, can so generally get over these reflections; or how they expect to account for the neglect of a duty on which such an infinite deal depends. Surely, did they believe in, and fear God, or expect a future reckoning; had they either humanity or conscience, they could not give up those, who rise out of their own bowels, or who maintain them with their labour, whom God has made, and Christ died for, to almost a certainty of being for ever unhappy. If such impious cruelty and contempt be not downright atheism, it must probably be very near of kin to it. This, however, is certain, that if one, who is capable of this crime, hath any religion at all, it must be in so scanty a measure, as to be of little or

no use to himself; for, had he enough to save his own soul, it could not possibly be confined to his own breast, when duty and humanity join to call it forth with a voice as loud, as God and nature can make it. How could charity or piety be deaf to such a voice?

The footsteps of God, and the signs of religion, are to be found in few families. How rarely do we see the master of a family bring his household together to worship and call upon God? What is this owing to? Does he think he and his can do well or prosper, without God's assistance? Or does he imagine, that God will favour and protect a family, that shews no marks of love, or fear, or dependence on him? But if he should say, that he, and the several members of his family, pray in secret, and that such prayers are sufficient; he in vain endeavours to impose an excuse on others, which cannot but be too gross to pass on himself. It is impossible for him to know, whether his children and servants do all of them worship God in secret, as often, and as properly, as they ought to do; whereas did he gather them, once or twice every day, to family prayers, he could form some judgment of their piety. But supposing it true, that they are all constant in their secret devotions, is that sufficient? Is there no necessity for public worship? Is not a congregation, or a family, as much bound to worship God, as a single person? It is certain, that all the works of God depend on him; and therefore owe him such a service as their several natures enable them to render. As God is the founder and supporter of all societies, so they are all obliged, as well as single persons, to acknowledge their dependence on him, and to worship him as societies. If there be any thing in prayers, or indeed in religion, the worship of God must be as necessary to communities, as to individuals. Whatever is capable of offending God, ought to confess, and ask pardon, if it does. Whatever wants his assistance ought to call to him for it. Whatever receives favours from him, and tastes of his goodness, ought to return him its thanks. But every society does sin against him, does depend on him, does receive favours, and those infinite ones, from him; every society ought therefore, as such, to worship him with repentance, humility, and gratitude.

If this were duly considered by the state, religion, and

the public worship of God, would become the chief care of the magistrate. And, were it considered by the master of a family, he could not withdraw himself, and all the concerns of his household, from their only dependence, by a neglect of those services and supplications, on which that dependence is founded, and without which it cannot be supported. He that knows himself to be dependent on a prince for his bread, and the maintenance of his family, does not think it sufficient to obey the commands of that prince, and to declare for his interest; no, he pays him all the court he can. If he has happened to offend him, he asks pardon in the humblest manner. If he stands in need of his assistance, he addresses him in the most moving words; and, upon the receipt of every new favour, is constant in his thanks, and loud in the praises of his patron. Did the same man think himself, and those under him, dependent on Almighty God, for not only their worldly support, but for every think else, surely he could not forbear any acts of duty or worship, which he thought would be agreeable, or would strengthen his interest with God, Nay one might expect, that he should persevere in such acts, even if he were persecuted for them by the civil power, and that he should openly acknowledge his dependence upon, and trust in a higher power, by the most avowed and public worship of him, at the peril of his life. It is no great matter to give up the whole world, and life itself, rather than neglect or dishonour a person, who has not only given us, life, and all that we enjoy, but died for us, aud can take all from us again.

What then shall we think of him who acknowledges, that he holds his life, his health, his substance, his all in this world, and his title to eternal glory in the next, from God; that owns, he is laid under no hindrances, nor even discouragements to the performance of this duty by the civil power, and yet will not perform it? How different is his practice from that of the prophet Daniel, from that of all the glorious martyrs for Christianity, nay, from his own principles and professions? To omit this duty upon principle, is to be an atheist. To omit it against principle, is in one, a degree of madness and baseness, the most desperate and infamous that can be imagined.

He who is truly, and in good earnest, a Christian, considers himself, and all that relates to him, or concerns him,

as governed and directed by the immediate providence of God, which overrules and disposes all things. This (as in prudence it ought) makes him constant and fervent in his secret devotions, as the only means (next to a good life) to procure the divine favour for himself. This makes him devout in the public services of the congregation, for public blessings to his country. This makes him careful in the performance of family worship, that the only dispenser of all events may deal graciously by his family. He sees plainly, that God has so framed the nature of man, that neither the great, nor the lesser societies, neither kingdoms, nor families, can be happy, nor indeed at all subsist without religion; by this necessary dependence on him, and continual intercourse between him and us, preserving a perpetual memory of himself among us. Convinced and fortified with this observation, the truly Christian master of a family takes care that religion be well known, and God constantly worshipped in his house. That his children may be sensible of his authority over them, and pay him the obedience due to a parent, he backs his authority with that of God, the universal parent. That his servants may be dutiful, industrious, and honest, he teaches them to fear tbe great Master, the Lord of lords, and governor of the world, from whom all power and authority, and his in particular, is derived. That every member of his little society may acquit himself properly in his station, and contribute to the good of the whole, he gives him a principle to do it on, and a motive strong enough to induce him; that is, he teaches him the doctrines, the duties, and motives of religion. And, that his instructions may not be lodged only in the memory of his dependents, and lie there inactive, like other speculative points, he gives them continual exercise; is perpetually employing and furnishing them with occasions of practice. To this his authority, which is absolute, and his example, in which the fear of God and devotion do at all times so conspicuously appear, contribute not a little. But that which, of all other methods, has the greatest share in preserving his religious instructions alive, and calling them into action, is, that by the daily service, to which he assembles his family, he feeds the sense of religion among them, and keeps God and their duty ever strongly present to their minds.

In a family where religion is known, and God devoutly worshipped, there is a conscientious tie on every one to discharge the duties that belong to his station; a tie strengthened by eternal rewards and punishments, and laid on the very soul. The parent and master consider themselves as accountable for the principles, and, in a great measure, for the salvation, of their children and servants. The children and servants consider, that they are to honour their parents as the representatives of God; and not to render only an eye-service, but so to obey and serve, as those, who, in every the most secret thought and action, lie open to the eyes of God. This produces a mutual discharge of duty on both sides, and that gives peace, order, and happiness, to the whole family.

As nothing but religion can work these happy effects, so we see, when that is wanting, there is nothing but quarrels, and confusion, and misery, to be observed. The mouths of parents are filled with complaints concerning the undutifulness of their children, and those complaints attended with extreme wrath and bitterness of soul. But, did they candidly consider from what causes the ill conduct of their children proceeds, they would, for the most part, find reason to turn their anger upon themselves, and change their complaints to remorse. The disobedience and impiety of their children are owing to want of religion, and that to their parents, who took little or no care to instruct them; and set them an irreligious example besides. They have sinned against the souls of their children, and those children are made, by Divine Providence, and a consequence almost necessary to the nature of things, the instruments of vengeance to chastise their horrid crime. Natural affection, and mere respect for parental authority, are not sufficient, without religion, to preserve children in their duty. Let no parent trust to them alone; for if he does, there is ten thousand to one, he is miserably disappointed.

We every day hear masters make the like complaints of their servants. Their servants, they tell us, are the plague of their lives. They do not indeed trouble us with any complaints about their lewdness, their blasphemies, their contempt of God's service, and of the sacrament; for those are only crimes committed against God; and they are not

concerned to prevent them. But we hear much of their idleness, their lying, their pilfering, and the like. These are really the most unjust and foolish complaints in the world, and such masters are well served. They expect obedience to their commands, without exacting any to those of God; that is, they hope for the effect without the cause, and expect that their servants should be dutiful, though irreligious, and ungodly. Their cruelty, to the very souls of their poor dependents, is justly punished by the dishonesty and sloth of those very dependents. And God too, most righteously chastises their neglect of his assistance, and contempt for his honour, by the very consequences of that contempt; for so it is, and so, in the nature of things, it must be, that unless masters teach their servants the principles of religion, and breed them up in the service and fear of God, those servants will, though unwittingly, take a speedy revenge; they will teaze, and plague, and cheat those, who have defrauded their souls of the only principles that could possess them with any sense of duty, or honesty. To complain of this is weak and unreasonable in their masters to the last degree. They might as well hope for the labour of their servants, without allowing them their food, as for their honesty and duty, without giving them the principles of either.

Among the many perversions of common sense, and distortions of human nature, that infidelity has introduced in these latter ages, none seems more surprising, than that unaccountable aversion to family prayers, which prevails so unhappily among us. Can there be any thing more natural, than that creatures should worship their Creator; that rational souls should make application to their Redeemer; or that the infirmities of nature should fly to the Spirit of God for comfort and succour? And, as prayer in general is most agreeable to nature, so the fellowship of those, who are joined to us by the nearest and tenderest ties, cannot but add to the natural pleasure that attends it. A good man can never think himself in a more honourable or happy situation, than while he is on his knees in the midst of his family, uttering the devotions of himself, his dear wife and children, and his dutiful domestics. He has before him, at that delightful juncture, all the occasions of happiness, that

God has given him; and is then employed in adoring the Giver, and blessing his benefactor. There is a transport of joy in this most tender act of worship, which none but a worthy and a great soul can feel; and which the libertine, in his keenest moment of sensual pleasure, has reason to envy. What is it then that raises such a coldness to this above all other kinds of worship? Surely it must be a want of religion and goodness, a want of love and reverence for God. He that neglects this duty, and is unacquainted with the pleasure that is to be found in the performance of it, may profess his faith as loudly as he pleases, and take it very ill to be called an unbeliever, yet how does his faith appear? What fruits, what proof can he shew of it, when it cannot produce an action like this, in which it is assisted with such a high and exquisite enjoyment? But he says, it is not he only, but many other good Christians, that omit this duty; and that, did he perform it, it would bring on him the censure of singularity and affected piety. How does he know that others, who omit this duty, are good Christians? In this, at least, they shew themselves to be no Christians at all. But, supposing them good men in other respects, why does he imitate that in which they so miserably fail? Does he approve of nothing but their faults? But where is the necessity of example for that which we know to be our duty? Why, to avoid singularity. Surely now to be alone in doing good is not a singularity; or, if it be, it is such a noble singularity, as is to be chosen before erring with the whole world. It is impertinent to dwell long on so pitiful an excuse. No man, that had a real sense of religion, could be kept, by such a cobweb as this, from the slightest and least agreeable duty of it. A true Christian, though he had neither precedent, nor second, among all the professors of Christianity, would nevertheless declare like Joshua, 'That he and his house should serve the Lord.' He would not idly and basely wait for examples, when love, gratitude, and such an unspeakable pleasure, drew him forward; but would pursue the agreeable duty, in which such a blessed enjoyment of God is to be tasted, did the furnace, seven times heated, open its fiery mouth in the way.

The neglect of prayer is owing, in some, to a want of religion. These people act consistently with their princi-

ple, though that principle is an error. But in those, who really do believe in God, it is a violence done to their own reason, and a downright contempt of his providence. They are led into this great folly and sin by want of consideration. They have principles, but they have not thought and prudence enough to apply them; so they are of no other use, than to bear witness against their practice. They have a religion to talk about, or to dispute for. It is in vain to look for it in their closets, in their families, in church, or in their hearts: it is only to be found in their memories, where it was lodged when they were children, with other disagreeable lessons. These people, of all others, are the hardest to be reasoned into the practice of religion, because they have got an habit of acting against principle, and making themselves easy, by a kind of composition between religion on the one side, and their interests and pleasures on the other.

But there are other believers, who lay no great stress on prayer, being persuaded, that God leaves the world to second causes; and that therefore a knowledge of those causes, and a dextrous management of them, is the grand secret of prudence, and the only scheme by which a man may contribute to his own happiness. This was the opinion of the Epicureans, who denied a Providence, and said, if there were such a being as God, that he left nature to itself, and took his pleasures above the clouds, without ever looking through them, to see what is doing here below. This notion is altogether inconsistent with reason, and destructive of religion. First, it is inconsistent with reason; because the unavoidable fallibility and infirmity of all created beings require the continual care and support of him that made them; and, as he is ever present to all his works, his infinite goodness must be supposed to interest him in the necessary support and repair of nature. We cannot conceive an employment more agreeable to the Divine Being, than that of providing for the happiness of his creatures; and this he seems to have reserved for himself and his angels, by creating the world in such a manner, as to require his providential care of it. Some deficiencies are immediately supplied, and some evils soon redressed. Others are reserved for certain periods, either stated, or occasional. And though second causes are

employed for these purposes, yet are those causes moved by the First Cause, and used only as the instruments of his will, to carry such succours, and make such changes, as the good order of things may require.

Again, the notion just now mentioned is destructive of all religion, and therefore altogether improper for the mouth of any, but an epicurean, as that sect of philosophers very well knew. God is the only author and teacher of religion; and since he has not made the knowledge of his will a part of our nature, we must either be ignorant of it, or else be instructed by him. But had God left us to ourselves, and to other second causes, his will could not have been revealed, nor our redemption wrought.

Since then God is not only 'the judge of all the earth, but the governor among the nations; since he that made the eye must see, and he that made the ear must hear,' why should we not bring our wants before him? Since he is merciful he must pity our distresses. Since he is infinitely wise and powerful he can easily find means to relieve them. 'For this reason shall prayer be made ever unto him, and daily shall he be praised.' For this reason the man, who is taught in Christ, and 'is wise unto salvation,' implores his assistance in every thing. He recommends his labours by day, and his rest by night, to the protection of God; and never thinks either himself, or his family, safe, till, by earnest prayers, he has put them under the guardianship of Providence. He is sensible, that the power of prayer is as the power of God; because it prevails with God, and engages his power in our behalf. This his daily experience teaches him, and the word of God supports his experience. When he sees the wrath of God, that was ready to fall upon the idolatrous Israelites, turned away by the prayer of Moses; when he sees the prayer of Joshua arresting the sun, and stopping the course of nature; when he sees the prayer of Elisha prevail over death, and restore to life the son of the Shunamite: when he sees the prophetical declaration of God reversed, and the life of Hezekiah prolonged by prayer; when he sees Daniel come alive out of the lion's den, after having trusted to prayer, in defiance of the greatest power on earth; he cannot entertain the least doubt concerning the force of prayer. His confidence is still increased by the

parable of the importunate woman, and the unjust judge, by the promises, the merits, and intercessions of Christ. The command, 'to pray always,' adds duty to his hopes, and makes his prayer an act of obedience, as well as a means of preservation. That his family may learn to trust in God, and to call upon him; that their prayers may have the greater force; that God may be present among them, and his fatherly providence watch over them; he gathers them together, and, uniting all their devotions in one request, and one voice, gives them all the weight and power that prayer can have. He feels the good effects of his piety, in the agreeable reflections he makes on the discharge of his duty, in the peace and security with which he fortifies himself and his affairs, in the daily blessings which descend upon his family, in return for their daily services, in the patience and firmness in bearing the unavoidable afflictions of life, which his continual devotions, and his entire dependance on God, have given him.

It is a grievous reflection, that instances of this kind are so rare. The generality of families have fallen away from God, and his service, have given up their dependence upon him, and sought for protection and support from riches, from policy, from worldly power; not one of which, nor all united, can avail any thing, without God; who wields them as so many instruments of his will, who 'putteth down one, and setteth up another,' who, with a resistless hand, controls and governs all things.

The infidelity of the times has banished religion out of most families. It has set up some to scoff at this, as well as other Christian duties; while it enters into others, under the mask of moderation, and renders their zeal too cold and feeble to resist ridicule. We may discover the depth of Satan in this libertine spirit, by the behaviour of those who maintain, that we have no need to support a priesthood, when every man has a right, and ought to be a priest in his own family. These very persons, who, for certain self-interested ends, contend for this right, are so far from living, in any respect, like priests, that they discover not the least signs of religion in their lives and conversations, or in their families. That priestly function, which they may, and ought to exercise in their families, I mean reading prayers to them, and

instructing them in the principles and duties of religion, they shew no sort of inclination to. They not only despise the very thoughts of having prayers in their houses, and even grace at their tables; but they laugh them out of the families of other weak men, who are guided by little else, in matrers of the last importance, than the mode; whose narrow understandings afford them but one rule for their clothes, and their religion.

As this contempt for family prayer is the effect of infidelity in people of fashion, so it is the cause of that ignorance among the vulgar, which, next to libertinism itself, is the scandal of this age and country; and, in all probability, will prove the ruin of the latter. Were the lower people, who have the fewest means of instruction, accustomed to hear a form of prayer pronounced once or twice a day, in their houses, they would, in a little time, and insensibly, learn that form by rote; so that, whatsoever principles or duties it contained, they would soon commit them to memory, and could afterward teach and explain them to their children. But, while they hear little or nothing of God and religion in their families, it is no great wonder if they at last almost lose sight of both. Were the principles of religion wrought into the forms of their devotion, and their devotions mixed with their daily business, as the chief, and that on which the success of all the rest, in a good measure, depends, it would scarce fail of having excellent effects on their piety, their knowledge, and the honesty and regularity of their lives. By this means, at the same time that the master of a family discharged the duty of domestic prayer, he might also at once go near to execute the other, of instructing his children and servants.

But it is not only the ignorance of religion, and that in the poorer families, that is, in so great a measure, to be charged on the neglect of family worship the miseries and distresses that afflict families of all kinds, do, in all probability, spring chiefly from this troubled fountain. The uncommon disasters and judgments, that fall so remarkably on ungodly families, sufficiently shew the danger of living without God. The furious grief, the racking impatience, the sullen murmurs, the wild and impious distraction, that in such families are observed to attend the common and or-

dinary afflictions of life, shew but too plainly, that as they have forsaken God, so God has forsaken them, and given them over to their own miserable infirmities, when they most need his assistance. 'The way of the Lord have they not known,' and, like 'true backsliders in heart, they are filled with their own ways.' Is it any wonder, that 'God should pour out his fury on these heathens, who know him not, and, upon those families, who call not on his name?'

The poor, who do not worship God in their families, instead of learning by their poverty to humble themselves before God, to pray to him, who alone is merciful enough to hear, and able to deliver; instead of learning to hate a world in which they have so small a portion, and so little pleasure, and to turn their hearts, and place their confidence in God; have forgot their dependence on him, have set their affections on things below, and put their confidence in unsanctified labours, and unjust arts. 'Surely they are poor, they are foolish; for they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God.'

As for the rich, who, though they have known the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God, have nevertheless neglected this duty, their ingratitude is as great as their folly. No favours can oblige them, no bounties tie them to God. 'They have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds.' They have discharged themselves and their families from the service of God. They are 'grown proud, and deny him, and say, who is the Lord? If they live and become old, yea, and are mighty in power; if their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes; if their houses are safe from fear, and God lays not his rod on them; if their bull gendereth and faileth not, and their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf; if they send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance; if they take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ; if they spend their days in wealth, and, by an easy death, go down in a moment to the grave;' do 'they therefore say unto God, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways?' Do they therefore say, 'What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit should we have, should we and our families pray unto him?' Might not one rather expect, that they should

say to their wives, their children, and their servants, 'Behold what great things the Lord hath done for us! He feedeth us with good things; he poureth his benefits upon us! O come therefore let us worship, and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker;' let us confess our sins together with sorrow and shame; let us, with one voice, pray for the continuance of all his mercies; 'let us come before his presence with a song; let us be thankful unto him, and speak good of his name, for it is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto his name; to tell of his loving kindness early in the morning, and of his truth in the night season?'

Upon the whole of this matter, let every master thus question with himself. Is it not for great ends and reasons that God has placed me at the head of a family? Am I not accountable to him for the discharge of this important office? Do not the future welfare of my children and my servants depend very much upon the education they receive from me? If I do not instruct them in the principles of religion, and breed them up to virtue, where shall they get instruction? Is there any thing dearer to me, than those who work for me, and depend on me? Can there be a greater crime than to neglect and defraud their very souls? Does not the providence of God govern the world? Is not God the founder and preserver of societies, and of families in particular? Can they subsist without religion? Shall I then suffer my family to want religion? Shall I not rather take particular care that my house serve God by daily prayer? Can any thing I do be so useful to us, as to worship him on whom we intirely depend? Can any thing be more agreeable than to serve and praise him, to whom we are so infinitely indebted? Shall my own idleness, or the scoffs of libertines, deprive us of so great a benefit and pleasure, and force me, like an atheist, ungratefully and impiously to shut out God from my family, to entail ignorance and contempt of God's worship on all my posterity and dependents? Shall I put my trust in my own endeavours? Shall I build my hopes upon the sand of this world, and forsake 'the rock of my salvation,' when I so plainly perceive the duty, the necessity, and the power of prayer? No, like the righteous Job, 'I will continually sanctify my family, that God may,' as he

did him, 'make a hedge about me and my house, and about all that I have on either side. We will seek his strength' in the time of trouble; in all our trials will we rely on it, and in our prosperity praise him with pure lips, and joyful hearts. 'Evening, and morning, and at noon, will we pray, and cry aloud, and he shall hear our voice.'

DISCOURSE XXXIX.

THE HONOUR DUE TO GOD'S NAME.

LEVITICUS XIX. 20.

Ye shall not swear by my name falsely; neither shalt thou profane the Name of thy God: I am the Lord.

WE know and speak of God as we do in relation to other beings; that is, we know him by his attributes, and speak of him by his name. When we make a vow to him, we consider him as omnipresent and omniscient, as a Being that searches the heart, and knows our thoughts. When we swear by him, or call on him to witness the truth of what we say, we are obliged to name him, as we do other witnesses; and the rather, as he is not visible, and therefore cannot be pointed to by the eyes or hands, as men, whom we appeal to, may, provided they are present with us. This is the reason why, in my text, in the third commandment, and in many other places of Scripture, swearing by the name of God signifies the same thing as appealing to God for the truth of what we affirm or deny. As, on all occasions, whether of appealing to, or discoursing of God, his name represents him to our apprehension, we are always to pay the same awful respect to his name, that we do to himself; that is, we are never to use it, but on important and necessary occasions, and then with the deepest veneration. It is reported of the famous Mr. Boyle, whose piety kept pace with his knowledge, that he never pronounced the name of God without bowing, or making an observable pause in his

conversation. His practice in this particular may possibly seem a little singular; but it will be a severe reproach to the rest of mankind, to say, the spirit from whence this practice proceeded was singular too. Few men know as much of God, or his works, as he did; but we all know enough, both of his majesty, and our own vileness, to fill us with awe and fear whenever he is suggested to our thoughts; particularly by that sacred and glorious name, which, distinguishing him from all other beings, points him out to our adoration.

Let us now, having found the right use of that only word in the text which might seem to throw any obscurity on the rest, proceed to consider the duties enjoyed us by the whole. Two things are here charged on our consciences; first, that 'we swear not falsly by the name of our God;' and, secondly, that, 'we do not profane that name;' and these two are pressed home by God, in the close, with these awful words, 'I am the Lord.'

That we may the better apprehend the nature and importance of an oath, or an appeal to God, and be thereby the better guarded against the danger of falling into either sin forbidden in the text, let us briefly trace the necessity of such appeals, and settle our notions concerning the use of them.

Our thoughts and intentions, till they are expressed by words, or reduced to action, cannot be discovered by others, who, in case they always remain thus concealed, are as little concerned in them, as they are acquainted with them. But, as soon as ever they begin to be of any consequence to the rest of the world, that is, as soon as they are intimated in words, or put in practice, it is then possible for the persons, whom they may concern, to come at the knowledge of them; so that, if they are in any measure injurious to themselves, or detrimental to the community, they may be either wholly, or in part, prevented; or at least, punished.

But when the words or actions are of such a nature, or the persons who speak or do them are so circumstauced, that neither redress nor animadversion can be procured, without application to the magistracy, then such evidence of what was said or done, as shall appear satisfactory, becomes absolutely necessary. The person struck at, can no more give this evidence, in most cases, singly and of himself, than the

party accused can clear himself by his sole testimony. Neither can the evidence of others, although seemingly indifferent, clear or ascertain the point, unless the judge can search their hearts, or they can deposit some pledge, fully sufficient to answer the damages that may arise from false testimony in the case. Nor can this pledge be either released, or finally forfeited, till the matter comes to be tried before a judge, who is able to search the witness's heart, and cannot be deceived.

Till such a judge can be found, the whole proceeding stops, and must remain in the same uncertainty that at first attended the discovery of the truth. It will be as reasonable to suspect the accuser of falshood, as the accused of the bad attempt or action laid to his charge. The characters of the persons concerned, and the circumstances of the case may balance each other; or, being unknown to the judge, may want farther evidence to clear them up; and that farther evidence may be as reasonably suspected as the first: for my saying, that such or such a witness is an honest man, is nothing, unless it is first proved, that I am a man of truth. His testimony, again, who vouches mine, must be vouched by another; and so on for ever. The most that can be made of testimony like this, is some shew of probability. But, generally speaking, the operation of laws, whether they relate to properties or crimes, is not safely to be trusted to probabilities, only in some few uncommon cases, where the probability approaches near to a certainty; which, with such testimony as I have described, is hardly ever to be expcted.

How then? Is law a lottery? Is the die thrown for a decree or verdict in every trial? Do property, liberty, and life itself, depend absolutely on chance? They certainly do, and for ever must, till a witness can be called, who knows what is doing, both openly and in secret, over the whole earth; who searches the hearts, and knows the inmost thoughts of all mankind; whose justice in manifesting the truth, is equal to his knowledge; and whose power to punish the deposer of a lie, is equal to his wisdom and justice. To such a witness as this all other witnesses must solemnly appeal for the truth of what they testify; and pledge their souls for the integrity of their depositions; or equity and

iniquity have but the same chance to result from their testimony. This appeal, thus backed by a pledge of infinite value to the appellant, is what we call an assertory oath; because the witness thereby asserts, that some particular fact was, or was not done, or, at least, that he does not with certainty know, whether it was, or not.

Men of this world, whose character it is to look no higher than to laws and magistrates of their own making, and to witnesses as slightly principled as themselves, may make a jest of religion; but we see it as a point evidently demonstrable, that, without it, there can be, in effect, neither law nor justice among men. Whatever they say against religion, is said against the laws of society, if they mean any thing else by law than a mystery of iniquity, contrived for the deception, and executed to the oppression, of all but the initiated.

But taking it for granted, that I have given a just and right notion of an oath, and its use, let us now see what is the duty of him who swears. The text says, 'he must not swear falsly.'

In the first place, then, that he may swear with the most scrupulous regard to truth; and, in order to keep this scrupulosity always awake, he ought never to swear but when compelled to it by necessity; that is, when truth and justice must be stifled, the property or life of his neighbour lost, and the legal authority resisted, in case he should refuse. The strict observation of this rule will greatly help to preserve the delicacy of his conscience in the few appeals he finds it necessary to make to Almighty God; for the old saying, that 'familiarity breeds contempt,' is not more true of lower things, than it is even of oaths; although God is invoked, and the soul staked, whenever we swear.

In the next place, as often as he is obliged to swear, he must awfully consider, what his religion tells him, that God is at his right hand,' nay, 'that God is about him, and within him,' wheresoever he goes, or whatsoever he does; that God, who knows all things, knows the fact he is going to swear to, and how far he may, if he pleases, be a competent witness in that fact; and, lastly, that, in swearing, he must appeal not only to an infinitely wise, but also to an infinitely

just and powerful Being, who will hold him to a severe account for what he says, and execute eternal vengeance on him, in case it is not strictly true.

These things feelingly laid to heart, he is then carefully to weigh the degree of knowledge he really hath, in the fact he is about to swear to; and, having nicely distinguished it from all higher or lower degrees, he must endeavour, in his deposition, as nicely and precisely to express his knowledge, fully declaring the whole truth, and scrupulously taking care to declare nothing but the truth; for if he swears to that, as certainly knowing it, which he only believes, or as matter of belief, which he certainly knows, as his thoughts and words do not go together, and as God is watchful to note the difference, the deponent stands no less guilty of perjury than he could have been, had he on oath affirmed that which he should have denied, or denied that which he should have affirmed.

Again, The swearer is to take care, that there be no darkness nor ambiguity, no shuffling nor equivocation, in his expressions; and if his words, in any thing, have imperfectly set forth his meaning, he must go over it again and again in other words, till he is sure they who hear him cannot possibly mistake it. His conscience ought severely to examine and cross-examine all he says; for the all-knowing Witness, with whom alone his conscience is concerned in this matter, cannot be deceived. Whatsoever sense, therefore, he either designedly or carelessly gives the hearers occasion to take him in, in that very sense will God understand him; and, if it is not strictly true, will convict him of, and punish him for, perjury. Neither the laws of religion, nor of language, will allow him to have two meanings, one for God, and the other for men, to what he says. In such appeals as we always make when we swear, our consciences ought ever to exact, what we know God certainly will, a close conformity between our thoughts and words. Francis the First, king of France, was brought prisoner to the emperor Charles the Fifth, at Madrid in Spain. The emperor, after detaining him for some time, gave him leave to return into France, on his oath to render himself again at Madrid by a certain day, if, before that day, certain other articles of agreement should not be duly performed by him.

The king never performed those articles, nor returned into Spain; but, to salve his conscience, and keep his oath, he built a place in France which he called Madrid; and there, with great formality, he rendered himself at the time appointed. This place stands to this day a monument of his perjury; and of another crime, if possible, greater than his perjury; for it perpetuates the memory of an attempt to impose on the all-knowing and awful God. Great as the crime of a flat and simple perjury is, it seems to be outdone by an equivocal oath, which supposes, either that God may be deceived by a double meaning, one declared, and the other concealed and reserved; or that, like a party to the perfidy, he may be prevailed with to connive at it.

Such is the nature of an assertory oath, and of our duty when we take it. There is another kind of oaths, called promissory, which are divided again into two sorts; the one made to men, wherein God is only a witness; the other made to God, wherein he is not only a witness, but a party. The last are called vows.

First, As to our duty in regard to promissory oaths made to men, we are, as in the former case, awfully to consider the wisdom, justice, and power, of him, whom we call on to attest our promise; and likewise to take care, that our expressions plainly and simply set forth our intentions. Here the instance, just now brought from the culpable conduct of the French king, comes up exactly to the present case, and shews us, by what he did not do, what we in the like case ought to do.

But, besides these rules, there are others, relating to the oaths I am now speaking of, which have no place in such as are only assertory. In the first place, when we promise any thing on oath to men, we are duly to consider whether we can perform it, or not; for, if we are not fully convinced we can, our oath is strongly tinctured with perjury from the beginning. Now there is one thing that may, and another that ought to prevent our performance. As to that which may prevent our intention, it is too various to be perfectly set forth in any discourse. The loss of our liberty, of our substance, of our senses, of our health, and of our lives; contrary winds at sea, wars, revolutions, and a thousand other accidents, may, according to the nature of the case,

hinder the performance of our oaths. We are, therefore, when conditions are not necessarily implied, always to express them in some form like this: 'So or so I will act, if God permit, or if I shall have it in my power.' But, having thus provided the proper conditions, and reservations, if we afterward change our intentions, and do not perform what we promised, on a pretence that it is not in our power, though it really is; or on a surmise that the party, to whom we gave the promise, hath not acted up to his engagements, though he really hath, we are as guilty of wilful perjury as he who flatly violates an unconditional oath.

That which ought to prevent the performance of a promissory oath, is, the unlawfulness of its matter. We are not at liberty simply to promise what the laws of God, or those of men which are conformable to his, have prohibited; much less may we add oaths to such promises; and if at any time we have been so rash as to do this, we must repent of it as a great and heinous sin. Now it is impossible both rightly to repent of the promise, and to do the thing promised. Here the law, which is good, must take place of our promise, which is evil; and therefore what we engaged to do, must by no means be done. Considered as Christians, all our thoughts, words, and actions, are already ruled by our baptismal covenant, which we ratified with a vow. Now the priority of a lawful vow, like that of all other lawful obligations, renders all posterior engagements of a contrary nature absolutely null and void to all intents and purposes. Yet, though the culpable obligation is void, it is not enough for us to say, we find the matter of our promissory oath unlawful, and therefore we will not keep it. No; we must consider, that we have sinned very grievously in making it; inasmuch as we called on God to be the guardian of an oath which he could not but detest, both in itself, and in the swearer. We were not content with a single breach of our vow and covenant with him, but we impudently and presumptuously desired him to be a witness of our crime. This sin, therefore, demands not only amendment, but our deepest sighs, and saltest tears.

Lastly, Having satisfied our consciences, that what we are going to promise on oath is both practicable and lawful, we must see, that our intentions to perform it be sincere and

firm; for, if God sees they are not, he sees us perjured, his holy name profaned, and that which we engaged for, no better secured than if he had never been made the witness and guardian of it. You may easily judge whether infinite Majesty can look on such a prevarication without the the most deep and settled resentment.

These considerations ought keenly to be laid to heart by all who enter into contracts of any sort through the solemnity of an oath; but more especially by such as have entered, or going to enter, into a married state. Can they expect God should bless them with love, peace, and fidelity, if they do not pay a just regard to that oath wherewith they are, in so sacred a manner, bound to the mutual exchange of those necessary virtues? No; if they neglect them, and the oath which enforces them on their consciences, they have nothing to expect, but a traitor and a tormentor, instead of an husband or a wife; and an hell, instead of a comfortable habitation, and a well ordered family.

They likewise, who are sworn into public employments of any kind, ought well to consider, both the great importance of the places they fill, and the dreadful strictness of the oaths they take, If they use no conscience in this, as the world knows they seldom shew any, do they think that 'God, whose kingdom ruleth over all,' will not call them into judgment for prostituting his glorious name to all the interested, mercenary, the iniquitous, the oppressive views, they had in suing for their posts? Do they, vainly elated with their present lucrative or honarary stations, imagine he will not scourge them as impudent intruders on his own majesty, and execrable traitors to men? Will the God of justice wink at public perjury, and public robbery? No, no, the atheist, low in his principles, though high in his station, may laugh at his oath, may remember it only to insult it with a violation of all its parts; may, for a time, employ the power he is trusted with, to purposes the very reverse of those he swore to promote; but he will find on that day, when it will be impossible to be an atheist, that 'there is One higher than the highest, who regardeth, to whom vengeance belongeth, and who will fully repay.'

As to our duty, when we promise any thing to God, which is what is understood by a vow, all those precautions

about our expressions, so necessary in other oaths, have nothing to do in this. Here God enters into our hears, and covenants with us by our naked thoughts. All we have, therefore, to look to in this case, is, first, the reasonableness and piety of what we promise; and the firmness of our resolution to perform it. If the thing we vow is rendered evil, either by its own nature, or by the revealed will of God, our vow, instead of consecrating it, serves only to desecrate our selves. And, if we are not fully convinced of our resolution to suffer every thing, rather than not perform it, we do but ensnare ourselves, and mock Almighty God. We never vow that which is not, by supposition, a matter of considerable difficulty; for, being right in itself, if it is pleasant or easy in the performance, there can be no inducement to tie ourselves to it by a vow. He, therefore, only is fit to make a vow, whose deep and lively sense of religion is sufficient to give him that firmness and perseverance which he does not find in his natural temper and make. In such a mind, it is of infinite use to have its piety pointed by a solemn vow directly against its infirmities. A vow, thus applied, will answer the end of a cannon planted in a breach, provided it is not suffered to lie idle. This is the use intended by that vow wherewith our baptismal covenant is enforced, which ought not only to prevent our making new ones of a contrary nature, but ought likewise to prevent all such subsequent vows, as only aim in particular at the performance of those duties which the covenant lays us under in general terms. To vow anew what we vowed in baptism, serves only to null, not strengthen, that original promise, wherein we contracted on oath to do all the good we can, and no evil; and therefore left ourselves no room for new promises to the same effect, unless, we suppose, against sense and reason, that our transgressions have wholly annulled and abolished the baptismal covenant and vow, and so made it necssary to come to new terms of our own invention with Almighty God. But the case is quite otherwise. The greatest sinner that ever was baptized, remains all his life under the obligation of his original contract, although totally deprived of all its benefits. Even a formal renunciation cannot discharge him, because his contract was ratified by an undeterminable vow. All that a transgressor can do, is

truly to repent of his sins; and, having recovered by meditation a lively sense of his baptismal vow, to renew it in his prayers, and at the sacrament of the Lord's supper. God authorises no other vows or contracts for the same purpose.

It is true, indeed, we may innocently, perhaps profitably, promise to God to do such actions, though left indifferent by the covenant, as may help to qualify us for the performance of those that we stipulated for. We may, for instance, consecrate a part of our time to fasting and prayer by a particular vow. Or, on the other hand, we may lay a vow against such actions, as, although not forbidden by the covenant, tempt us to the transgression of some article contained thereinr If, for example, we are addicted to drunkenness, we may promise to abstain from strong liquors, although the covenant permits the use of them. Such vows as these tend only to aid us in the due observation of our original vow, and therefore seem rather useful, in some cases, than culpable. And yet it must be owned, that, in vowing obedience when we were baptised, we did, by implication, vow the means necessary to that obedience. However, as the actions I am speaking of were left indifferent by our original contract, and only became otherwise by accident, the tying ourselves up in respect to them cannot, I think, be displeasing in the sight of God, since we do it with so good a design.

It is certain, there is no one thing that concerns a Christian so much, as to keep his attention always fixed on his baptismal vow; because the covenant he thereby bound himself to, is the great rule by which he is to live here, and be judged hereafter. If he does not do this, he is in danger of spending the greater part of his days in direct opposition to the awful doctrine of my text, as well as to all those other places of Scripture, that immediately forbid his sins. Few men consider, as they ought to do, that, over and above the peculiar guilt they contract by each particular transgression, they are perjured in every one of their sins.

Having explained to you, as well as I could in so short a compass, the doctrine that comes naturally under the first part of my text, before I proceed to the other, it may be useful to observe to you, that, as it is by an oath we become Christians, and as by oaths all the laws of civil society ope-

rate, it concerns us above all things, whether we cast our eyes on this world, or the next, to consider perjury as the crime most capable of doing mischief among mankind, and therefore the most likely to provoke the indignation of Almighty God. In all transgressions of our baptismal covenant, he is the party immediately injured by it. And whenever, in the affairs of the world, it is applied to pervert justice, his name is prostituted to that abominable purpose; and he who is the supreme Governor, the King of kings, and the guardian of justice, is, as far as the horrible impiety of mankind can do it, made the instrument and means of all iniquity. Robbery, rebellion, murder, &c. are looked on as crimes of the first magnitude, and punished with death in almost every country. But are we to regard perjury as a less heinous crime, because it is followed in this world with less alarming consequences? No; 'let us not judge by appearances, but judge righteous judgment.' In respect to God, no crime we can commit, blasphemy only excepted, strikes so directly at his majesty as this; which so far shares the nature of blasphemy, that it practically denies the wisdom, justice, and power, of God; or, if it owns, defies them. If hope of impunity is the most tempting encouragement to all manner of wickedness; and if perjury gives all other sins the greatest hopes of impunity, then perjury beside its own peculiar malignity, brings with it the foul stain of all other sins. Every one who hath frequented the trials of our civil courts, hath seen it steal, rob, ravish, cut throats, and take fees. Let no detestable dealer in perjuries, who lives by the infernal retail of oaths, presume to say (none else, I am sure, will say it), that I too highly aggravate the heinousness of this crime, so big with every sort of enormity; in respect to God, owning and denying, professing and renouncing him, with the same breath; and, with respect to men, ever punishing the innocent, and rewarding the guilty, and doing all it can to bring the affairs of mankind under subjection to the author of evil. No; it is impossible to exceed here. This is one of those crimes which leaves all the eloquence of oratory, and all the paintings of poetry, far behind; and can be fully expressed by nothing, but the despairing groans of him who suffers for it in eternal flames.

The latter part of my text forbids the profanation of God's name; by which is probably meant a crime distinct from that which is forbidden in the former; not but that every abuse of God's name is a profanation; however, as it is here prohibited in the same sentence with perjury, we ought to take it for a different sin. It is that sin, then, which we mean by common swearing; a practice of so odd a kind, and seemingly so foreign both to our temptations and infirmities, that nothing, at first view, can appear more unaccountable. It is nevertheless, no difficult matter to trace it to its source.

Oaths being used, in matters of importance, 'for confirmation, and for an end of all strife among men,' as St. Paul expresses it; and men being, in a great measure, left to judge for themselves of the importance requisite to bring any particular affair under the decision of an oath; it was not altogether unnatural to apply them in cases of too little consequence to suit with the solemnity of an appeal to God. From hence it might come, that, by little and little, they were brought in to confirm assertions in private conversation; and at length used as arguments in matters of opinion; insomuch that many, for want of rational proofs, or of credit, to support what they say, impiously call on God to attest asseverations too trifling to require the word of a child.

But howsoever it comes to pass, men accustomed to back what they say with such proofs, are generally less believed than those who only give their word; and are suspected of lying as often as they are obliged to have recourse to swearing. And indeed it is but just to suspect them; first, because common or profane swearing is a sure mark of a rash, hasty, and giddy disposition. Now all the world knows, that people of this turn seldom stay to examine things; that they form their opinions too precipitately, and pronounce too vehemently; and that therefore no sort of men are so likely to make mistakes, and propagate them, whenever they are believed. The use they make of oaths, shews, they themselves are sensible of this, and should serve to no other purpose, but to give warning of the lie to which they are tacked. In the next place, their too great familiarity with oaths is enough to render them suspected, when

they swear with the utmost solemnity, and in matters of the greatest importance, before a court of justice. They who are ever and anon appealing to God, and forcing his name into every trifling sentence, cannot be supposed to think of his Divine Majesty with that awe and reverence which is necessary to the solemnity of an oath. Such men, therefore, as they deserve, so they meet with, less credit than any other sort of men. Besides, in the last place, it is very observable, that this sort of swearing generally arises from a consciousness in the swearer, either that what he says is incredible in itself, or that his naked affirmation, so low is the character of his integrity, can give it no credit with the world. There is a sort of bashfulness in lies, that makes them afraid to venture out till they have an oath to give them countenance; whereas truth hath a right to be confident, because it is self-supported.

There are others, again, who swear in conversation, not that they care much whether they are believed or not, but because they have got a habit of swearing. They heard others swear, and therefore they swore; and swore on, till their tongues were so accustomed to pronounce the dreadful words, that they did not need to be prompted by their thoughts. Perhaps I should ask pardon for seeming to ascribe the power of thinking to wretches, from whom no sense of gratitude to an infinitely gracious God, nor any fear of almighty vengeance, can extort so low an instance of duty, as that of abstaining from a crime they have not the least temptation to commit.

There is a third sort of swearers, whose tongues are too nimble for their brains, and who are therefore (being determined to keep them always going) obliged to supply those active organs of sound with a set of standing words, which mean nothing, but serve to keep them in motion, till their tardy thoughts can furnish them with a more pertinent sort of nonsense. They pitch on oaths for their purpose, because they are a rattling and sounding sort of words, that make up in noise what they want in sense, and so seem better fitted than any others to fill up the vacancies of discourse. Were there no profanation in this practice, surely a man might infinitely better consult the credit of his understanding by holding his tongue, than by swearing, which, at the

best, is but talking for want of something to say. A poor shift for poverty of thought! and capable of exciting only pity or contempt, were it not that the ridiculous meanness of the thing is lost in the horror we are struck with at such enormous profanation. How can the rest of mankind, who yet retain some respect for Almighty God, bear to hear his holy and glorious name not only mixed with trivial, nonsensical, or lewd discourse, but mixed with it, for no better purpose, than to daub up its gaps and broken pauses.

There are others, again, who abound sufficiently with small thoughts, and words suitably significant, which, put together, make but sorry entertainment for the hearer. To remedy this great defect, and give their conversation an air of spirit and fire, they here and there enliven their insipid sentiments with a bold dash of blasphemy, which thunders in the ears, and terrifies the minds, of such as have the misfortune to hear them. They would have us take this for the sure sign of a fierce intrepid spirit, awed neither by respect towards men, nor by the fear of God. All this, however, is mere affected flash, and the world knows it. The world knows full well, that this bullying appearance is put on only to conceal a real littleness of soul; and accordingly always regards loud and boisterous swearing as the infallible mark both of a senseless mind, and a dastardly heart. How often have we seen a wretch of this stamp, after thus insulting the Majesty of heaven, submit patiently to the vilest indignities from a man whom every-body knew to be no great hero? But we should not forget, that those worthies swear as much to shew their wit, as their mettle? And is it not equally a proof of neither? Can there be any wit in an oath? If others have used it for ages, can there be any thing clever in the repetition of a little nonsense worn threadbare by the mob in every kennel? Or hath any man reason to value himself on the invention of a new oath, wherein there cannot possibly be any thing either to surprise or please, but the bare impiety of the expression? Impiety, it is true, may please. But whom? Not, surely, the sensible or good. And it is only the fool, and the scoundrel, whom these witlings would tickle, at the expense of every thing sacred. It is perhaps unreasonable to grudge them a satisfaction so very small, for which they are to pay their souls, thus rated by them-

selves, in the sight of God, at half a mite, while, in the same instance, they are paraded off to an unthinking world, as souls of the first magnitude.

These men, however, whom I have been speaking of, are a sort of Christians, and only swear by that which they seem at other times to lay some stress on. They have a little faith, which serves to give a proportionable significance to their profanation. But why swears the atheist by God; and the deist by Christ? Who hath made converts of their tongues, and given them just religion enough to swear by? No one; their tongues are still as infidel as their hearts; but they intend their oaths for blasphemy; nay, for a sort of proofs, that there is no truth in religion; for we are to understand, that these men of genius swear only because they no not believe; and do not believe, because they have found out, that religion is a lie. And would they have us take them in this light, when they are called before a court as evidences, or sworn into a place of trust and profit? for here they will swear to some purpose, as well as in company for amusement; but the public ought a little better to consider, that the oath of an infidel can be no pledge for his fidelity.

There is hardly any vice that is not as ridiculous on the one side, as it is shocking on the other. Swearing falsely is taking God's name in vain; because, instead of clearing up the point it is applied to, it only serves to conceal the truth, and set those astray who depend on it. Here the vice looks as shocking as all the wickedness it abets, and its own horrible impiety, its own infernal treachery, can make it. Profane swearing is taking God's name in vain, because it is applied to no purpose. Here it looks as ridiculous and contemptible as the gross, the excessive folly, it springs from, can render it. Viewed altogether, it presents us with the picture of a devil playing the buffoon, whose countenance is compounded of horror and grimace.

To conclude: let the profaner of God's awful name know, that although it is beneath the dignity of the infinitely serene and majestic Being to pursue every insolent offender with immediate vengeance; yet a time shall come, when he who now lifts his head aloft, and sputters, 'his great words against the Most High,' must fall down over-whelmed with

despair in his presence; when the stubborn heart must melt at his looks, and the blasphemous tongue lick the dust before him. Then, at least, he must learn to fear the great, the glorious, the terrible, name of God, when the almighty arm is lifted up to vindicate its honour.

As to you, who may have hitherto been less scrupulous than you ought about the truth of what you swore to, put your heart in deep mourning for the horrible offence; tremble and repent before the all-knowing Judge of angels and men; and let me earnestly press you, as you fear God, and regard your soul, to a fixed resolution never to swear for the future, but when the clearing up of some weighty truth necessarily requires it. As often as this shall be the case, feelingly, fearfully, consider what you are going to do. Consider, that the property, the credit, the liberty, perhaps the life, of your neighbour, is to be determined by your oath; for the truth of which, you are not only to kiss the Bible, but to appeal to Almighty God with a solemnity suitable to his majesty, and the importance of the cause you are called to. These things duly laid to heart, let it be your business to swear exactly in the same manner as if you were summoned to your oath before the throne of God at the last day; for, whether it is here, or there, that you swear, consider, it is in the presence of that God who knows all things, who forgets nothing; of that just and almighty Being, who speaks to you in my text, saying, "'You shall not swear falsely by my name, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the Lord:' that is, I am he who now governs, and will hereafter judge, the world, I am he who can and will reward the man of true piety and integrity with the joys of heaven; and I also am he who will punish the vile offender, that swears falsely by my name, and profanes it, with the torments of hell. I am the Lord, gracious to the good, and terrible to the wicked. I am the Lord, 'who execute righteousness and judgment.' I will bless him 'who sweareth to his hurt, and changeth not; but my curse shall enter into the house of him that sweareth falsely by name. Mine eyes run to and fro through the earth; and behold, because of swearing the land mourneth; for there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God, in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adul-

tery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Shall I not visit,' shall I not execute vengeance, for such things as these? 'Yes; I will be a swift witness against the false swearer.' I will convict him, not only of his prevarication, but of all those other crimes which he hath concealed and encouraged by his perjury."

Such is the sin of perjury; such the sin of taking God's holy name in vain; and such his indignation against both. Let us feelingly lay these things to heart. Let us consider, that we ought not to be insolent, merely because God is patient; for vengeance is his, and, in due time, he will surely repay. Art thou a profaner of God's awful name? Detestable fool! What pleasure, what profit, accrues to thee from this abominable practice for the present? And how dost thou set thyself up as a mark for the arrows of the Almighty, when patience, long abused, shall kindle into indignation, and mercy itself call for vengeance on thy head? Or hast thou the boldness to call on God to attest a lie? Know, odious deceiver, that, if there is a God, thy own horrible crime, and every other sin concealed, abetted, encouraged, thereby, shall, with accumulated judgment, be fearfully punished in thee. Know, dark infernal monster, that, if there is a devil, his fate and thine must be the same; for thy soul is black, treacherous, and impious, like his. Know, O thou vilest of men! thou rebel to God! thou pest of human society! that, if there is an hell, there must be thy portion for ever; and think what it is to 'dwell with everlasting burnings.' Think, think, and repent.

Let us now earnestly beseech Almighty God to fill us with an awful fear of his holy and glorious name, that we may never presume to utter it, but with the deepest reverence; nor appeal to it, but with the utmost regard to truth. Grant this, blessed Father, for the sake of Christ Jesus our Redeemer; to whom, with thee, and the Holy Ghost, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now, and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XL.

CHRISTIANS MUST FOLLOW CHRIST.

PHIL. II. 5.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

It was the intention of the apostle, in the passage from whence this text is borrowed, to press the Philippians to humility, unanimity, and patience, by the glorious example of our Saviour. It was impossible to urge an argument of greater force; for besides that nothing hath a stronger influence upon the actions of men than the example of those they admire, whereas this was the example of a person they adored; they were moreover, as the disciples of Christ, under an indispensible duty, under an absolute necessity, of following their great leader, in order to accomplish the same blessed design, and arrive at the same happy place, to which he had shewn them the way.

For this purpose it was necessary they should be acted by the same principles, nnd governed by 'the same mind and spirit, which was also in Christ Jesus.' Again, as members of his sacred body, the church, they must have been willing to renounce their own foolish minds, their own carnal hearts, and give themselves up entirely to the government of that infallible mind: for no man can be really a member of Christ's body,who is not governed by the mind of Christ. A man may indeed have the name, and claim the outward privileges, of a Christian, by being baptized and continuing in the profession of Christianity; but if he is still the slave of his own passions, if he is governed by his own mind and will, how can he call himself a member of Christ's body? Does he not know that in the great day, when 'the wheat and the chaff shall be separated, there shall be neither spot nor wrinkle left in the body of Christ, but that it shall be holy and without blemish?' How then can he imagine, that a dis-

orderly, a convulsive, or a dead member shall be suffered to remain in it? on that occasion, the mere professor may say to Christ, have I not been baptized into the Christian church? Have I not eat at thy table? Have I not lived and died in thy religion; nay, he may even say, 'have I not preached in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils?' But this will avail him nothing; for Christ will say unto him, 'I know you not; depart from me all ye that work iniquity.'

Since then the benefits of Christianity are to be expected upon no other terms, than those of having the mind or spirit of Christ, and, as a necessary consequence of that, living up, as far as human frailty will permit, to the example of Christ, it must, in the highest sense of the words, be both our duty and interest to set that great example before us, and, by considering it well, and labouring to follow it, satisfy ourselves, that, in the mean of our actions, we are governed by no other mind but his.

In the first place, there was in Christ a perfect purity and freedom from all sin. 'He was made like unto us in all things, sin only excepted.' Although he had the soul, the body, the senses, the passions, and affections, of a man, yet no temptations could betray him into the smallest inclination to sin. In order to reclaim them, he conversed with the grossest of sinners, and suffered even the devil to tempt him with all the allurements, with all the pomps and pleasures, of the world; for their seducer, not knowing, that 'in him the fulness of the godhead dwelt bodily,' tried on him all those arts, that had proved but too successful with Adam, David, Solomon; that is, with the wisest and best of men; but all in vain. The mind that was in Christ Jesus, being infinitely wise, saw easily through all his disguises, and all his snares; and, being perfectly good, rejected his offers, with a superiority and calmness, that shewed, he had not the least struggle with himself in doing it. And what is well worth our observation, is, that his behaviour on that occasion might afford us an example capable of imitation, he did not seem to apply to his divinity to repel the attacks of his adversary, but used such arguments as we in like case may furnish ourselves with, to fortify himself against temptation; that is, passsges of Scripture. 'Christ then hath left us an

example, that we should follow his steps, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.'

But if we fall into a course of sin, we can have no resemblance of Christ, and therefore cannot be united to him: we do not follow Christ, and consequently cannot expect to enter into glory, to which there is but one path, marked out by his blessed foot-steps.

In the history of our Saviour we have the highest instances, and the brighest example, of piety, which it is possible for the imagination to conceive; and which seems to be placed before our eyes, in a great measure, for our imitation: for as his divine nature put the accomplishment of all his purposes within the power of a single act of his will, to desire, and execute, was the same thing with him. And yet, as he was a son, and a man, he, on many occasions, addressed himself to his Father, with all that dignity and simplicity, all that duty and fervency, which ought to conduct and enliven the devotions of a mere man. What must we think of the necessity we are under of duly performing this sacred instance of service, when we see the Son of God, who could command ten thousand of angels to do whatever he desired, falling on the ground, and putting up his petitions to the Father? This considered, how can a Christian despise or neglect this duty; and to excuse himself in so doing, say, that all events are left to the natural course of second causes; or that God, knowing our occasions better than we do, neither wants to be informed or solicited in relation to them? If such persons had the mind that is in Christ Jesus, they would not thus set his doctrine, in respect to prayer, at variance with his practice, but rather make use of the one to explain the other. It is true, 'God knows our wants better than we do ourselves,' as our Saviour hath told us, and is infinitely gracious and ready to supply them. But are we, for this reason, to forget our dependence on him, or expect, although we should, to be gratified on a less application, than his only-begotten and well-beloved Son? If the spirit of Christ be in us, it will not fail to carry up our spirits and hearts in the warmest acts of devotion to that throne of grace, to which the prayers and praises of our blessed pattern were directed.

There was nothing in our Saviour's life that supplies us with a more useful or a more distinguished example than his astonishing charity. He came into this unhappy world, he took on him our nature, liable to so many and grievous miseries, to save sinners; that is, to save from eternal misery, and conduct to everlasting glory, a race of wretches in open rebellion against himself. He healed the distempers of our bodies, cured the disorders of our minds, raised to new life those who were dead, either in a temporal or spiritual sense; and, after all the indignities and cruelties we could load him with, when he was nailed to the cross by our hands, he prayed to his Father to forgive us. Can we call ourselves the disciples of such a Master, 'if we have not love one towards another?' If that aimable and forgiving mind be in us, which was in Christ Jesus, instead of doing any hurt to our neighbour, we shall labour to do his soul and body all the good we can; and, if he chance to injure us, we shall seek a noble revenge only in serving him with all the good offices in our power. His example in this respect he himself recommends to us. 'As I have loved you, love ye also one another.' As to forgiveness of injuries, we have stronger reasons to follow his example in that respect, than he had to set it; for he was without sin, and wanted no forgiveness; but we, being encompassed about with many infirmities, are daily offending both God and man; and therefore lie under greater obligations to forgive, as we stand in so great need of forgiveness. We ought to feel the infirmities of others in our own, and be led from thence to pity and pardon in our fellow-creature, what we have so much reason to lament in ourselves. Were we as free from sin, as Christ himself, it would be our duty to forgive; for otherwise we could not be like him; and how much more then, since we ourselves are offenders?

Again, in the life of our Saviour we have a most wonderful example of contentment. Although heaven and earth belonged to him, as their maker and proprietor, and he could have furnished himself with pleasure and glory from the fulness of both; yet he condescended 'to take on him the form of a servant,' of a poor and needy person, of an exile, 'of a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief;' who, though he made all things, and gave the very foxes their

dens, and the young ravens their food, 'had not where to lay his head,' nor any legal property of his own to support him. How unworthy of such a master must that disciple be, who coming naked into the world, and possessing nothing, but by the mere bounty of Providence, is dissatisfied with his condition, because he enjoys not more of this world's wealth and honour than his Divine Master? But he thinks he hath deserved a better lot: deserved of whom? Of God? If he hath vanity enough to stand upon his merits with Providence, let him know, that eternal infamy and misery is all he can deserve of God. If he had the mind of Christ, he would sit down satisfied with the low and indigent condition of Christ. We do not enough consider how greatly Christ hath dignified poverty by his example, as well as sweetened it by his precepts. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit,' says that gracious Master, 'for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' As 'Christ's kingdom was not of this world,' that man can be no follower of his, who cannot be satisfied without something like a kingdom here, although he may, by humility, provide a much better one hereafter.

Our Saviour's example affords us the highest instance of resolution that can be conceived. There is nothing shocking or terrible in nature, which he was not obliged to encounter with. The utmost cruelty of man, edged by the blackest malice of devils, was discharged upon him in distresses of every kind. He was slandered, reproached, spit upon, buffeted, betrayed, falsely accused, and cruelly murdered. Now, though he could have avoided all this, yet he went through it all with a calmness and steadiness perfectly astonishing and inconceivable. Such resolution makes even humility majestic. If fortitude does not comprehend all the virtues, it is at least the foundation of them all; insomuch that there is no being a Christian without it; for he who is a Christian, must have firmness and perseverance to withstand all trials, to face all dangers, and contemn all calamities, that may attempt to frighten, or force him from his duty; with strength and constancy to resist all allurements that might otherwise seduce him from it. There is no warfare, in which so high a degree of resolution is required, as in that against our spiritual enemies. It is for this reason, that we ought to fix our eyes on the

courageous example set us by our great leader, that, if possible, we may be fired with a portion of the same glorious and undaunted spirit, that shone in him with so much lustre amidst all his horrible conflicts. Nothing but the mind that was in him can enable us to fight our way through the various difficulties that stand between us and 'the prize of our high calling,' the crown of everlasting life. The irresolute and fickle Christian hath no courage to renounce the world, or to subdue himself; but is ever wavering and dodging between his principles and his passions; as if it were possible to travel on the narrow way, and the broad at once; though the one leads to hell, and the other to heaven. 'Woe be to the fearful heart,' says the son of Sirach, and 'faint hands, and the sinner that goeth two ways.' Can such a man, 'who is unstable in all his ways,' hope that so unsteady a soul, and so dead an heart, will ever be able to carry him up through that steep and difficult, though glorious path, his Saviour hath trod before him, and marked every step of it with his blood? No; it is impossible. Heaven must be taken by storm, and can never be won by so cowardly and so faint-hearted a soldier.

Again, as our hearts are corrupt, our affections unclean, and our passions wild, there is no one virtue we stand more in need of than self-denial. Self, mistaken and degenerate self, is our greatest enemy; and therefore to guard against, and subdue ourselves, is a duty of the most necessary obligation, and a matter of the highest consequence. Now the whole life of our blessed Saviour is, from beginning to end, a most wonderful example of self-denial. Although he could have had no occasion for this virtue on his own account, he being purity and holiness itself, yet, in order to set the necessary precedent, as the Son of God, he denied himself the glories and raptures of heaven, and, as the son of man, all the pomps and pleasures of the world, and became a man of sorrows, to save others. What notion can we have of the grandeur of that mind, that was all tears and tenderness to the miseries of other men, nay of even the bitterest enemies, but had no relenting for himself, when he felt that agony which forced his blood through his pores, and saw the shame and terror of his death approaching? No language hath a name for this height of virtue. Generosity, and self-

denial, and mortification, and mercy, all put together, are by no means sufficient to express it, St. Paul argues extremely well with us, upon this example. 'We then,' says he, 'ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour, for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself.' The self-pleaser, and the self-willed, is too unlike Christ to have any share in him, and is governed by a mind so narrow, and so opposite to the mind of Christ, that it is impossible he should ever be united to him. How can he be a member of Christ, who centres all his pleasures and interests in himself, not in Christ, the head, nor in his fellow-Christians, the members of Christ's body. He cannot be an eye, nor a hand, nor a foot, in such a body, which hath but one common interest; for he never sees, nor acts, nor stirs, but for himself, unhappily, for his own mistaken self. His mind is very unlike the mind of Christ; for that, wherever it works at all, works for the common good of the whole body.

But farther; there is in the life of our Saviour the most perfect pattern of humility. Although he was the King of heaven, yet 'he took upon him the form of a servant,' and in that form endured, with an amazing calmness, the contempt of those he came to save. He, who had been accustomed to the hosannahs and hallelujahs of angels, submitted to the scoffs and taunts of men, who called him 'a madman, a wine-bibber, and sinner.' He heard the blasphemy of the multitude, but made no reply; 'for as a lamb before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.' They spat in his face, and scourged him, and he submitted with infinitely greater humility, than those who are guilty are able to shew on the like treatment. His example in this respect he himself hath expressly recommended to us. 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.' When he had washed the feet of his disciples, he said unto them, 'know you what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord, neither he that is sent, greater than he that sent him. If ye

know these things, happy are ye, if you do them.' As there is no vice, to which the nature of man is so prone, nor that of God so averse, as pride, so our blessed Saviour took particular pains to enforce the example of his own humility on us for that very reason. And shall we, when we see the Son of God stooping so low, carry ourselves with an high head, and stiff neck? Shall we, who are but earth and ashes, refuse to bear what he did, to 'whom all power in heaven and earth was given, who is exalted above all principality and power, and to whom a name is given, at which every knee must bow?' The proud man hath not that mind which humbled Christ 'to the death of the cross; for which God exalted him, and gave a name, which is above every name;' but that mind and spirit, which threw down Satan out of heaven, into a place of endless shame and torment.

Again, As by nature and necessity we are for ever to be subjects, to the church and the civil magistrate here, and to God hereafter, there is no disposition or virtue more necessary to us than obedience; and therefore we ought to train ourselves to it, with the utmost diligence, by all the precepts of the gospel, and particularly by the example of our blessed Saviour, in which this virtue shines forth in a peculiar manner. We know, that as he is God, 'all power belongeth unto him;' and yet he paid the most exact obedience, not only to the will of his Father, but even to the rules of the Jews, as well civil as ecclesiastical; although those rulers were either the worst of men, and the most lawless of usurpers, or only the mere deputies and delegates of his own power. Besides, the obedience which he humbled himself to, was, in another respect, the greatest instance of resignation that ever was heard of; because he not only submitted to authority and power, but to persecution and injustice, of the severest and grossest nature. Though a king, he submitted to the punishment of a slave; though innocent, to the death of the guilty, There is no such obedience required of us by Almighty God, nor can be; because before him we are all servants, all guilty. Men indeed may punish us for a crime we never committed; but in this they are only the instruments of Providence, to lay on us a small part of those sufferings, which are most justly due to us, on account of our manifold offences in other respects. But,

supposing us entirely innocent, what does the example of our blessed Saviour recommend to us? A humble resignation. His precept also does the same; 'if thine enemy smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also.' St. Peter likewise reasons very well with us to that effect. 'This is thank-worthy, if a man, for conscience toward God, endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if when ye be buffetted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently; this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.' Thus certainly will he demean himself who is governed by the spirit of resignation and obedience, that was in Christ Jesus; and instead of thinking it a disgrace to him, will glory in sharing with his Lord and Master, the honour of an innocent sufferer.

Again, in the life of our blessed Saviour there is a most useful example of patience, in comparison of which even that of Job was but discontent and fretfulness. Through his whole life he met perpetual contradiction and opposition; which however was on no occasion able to ruffle the settled calmness of his mind. He found his disciples stiff in their prejudices, in ignorance, and worldly-mindedness; through pride contending for superiority, through vanity raising objections, through incredulity disbelieving or doubting, in spite of the most express prophecies, and the most amazing miracles; and, through a deadness to spiritual doctrines or promises, ready, on every occasion, to desert or betray him. Yet he held on instructing them, with meekness, till he changed them into a different kind of men. The Scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, took their turns to encounter him with difficult questions, which he baffled with astonishing wisdom, but never triumphed or insulted. There was no kind of artifice, no degree of cruelty, unemployed by the rulers of the Jews, to stop the progress of his doctrine, or to destroy his person; but all could never force him either to complain or repine. When he was arraigned, and nothing could be brought against him, but the clamours of a malicious multitude, he pleaded the cause of his inno-

cence only with silence; and, though he heard his judge almost with one breath declaring his innocence, and condemning him to die, he was not in the least discomposed at the iniquity of the sentence, at 'their preferring a thief before him,' at 'their cloathing him in derision with purple,' at 'their crowning him with thorns,' at 'their bending the knee to him, and mocking him with, Hail king of the Jews,' at 'their binding his hands,' at 'their making long furrows in his back' with their scourges, at 'their spitting in his face,' at 'their first blind-folding him, and then striking him;' and afterward 'bidding him prophesy who it was that smote him.' All this could draw no sign of impatience from him.' Still he was calm and undisturbed. When at last they nailed him to his cross, and stood round him, making a jest of his pains, and sporting themselves with his agonies, he was even then not only as meek and patient as ever, but, while his body was shivering in the agonies of death, his soul was melting with tenderness and compassion towards his murderers, and pleading with his Father for their pardon, by the only argument their injustice and cruelty had left him; 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.' O astonishing patience! O inconceivable goodness! What an example is here! With what sentiments of mind and heart should we receive it! Let us in imitation of this surprising and affecting pattern, 'run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right-hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.' Surely ye cannot forget the exhortation, 'which speaketh unto you, as unto children, my son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Farthermore, ye have had fathers of your flesh, who cor-

rected you, and ye gave them reverence: shall ye not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened you after their own pleasure; but he for your profit; that you might be partakers of his holiness. Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them who are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and bring forth fruit with patience, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope.' Wherefore if, in the course of things, afflictions should come upon you, or it should be your lot to be persecuted for your honesty, or your religion, take up your cross cheerfully; and with a patience and constancy like that of your master, 'fight out the good fight of faith,' and, at the last, you shall find yourself with him in peace and happiness, which shall have no end.

The history of our blessed Saviour affords you many other useful examples, which, on particular occasions, may be highly serviceable to you. For instance; his gravity (for there is a tradition, that he was never seen to laugh) if imitated by you, will prepare you for meditation, will help to keep your mind free from vain and foolish thoughts, and may sometimes awe and restrain those you converse with from light and wanton discourse, which is infectious, and never entirely free from guilt; for he hath assured us, 'that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.' His boldness in maintaining the truth, and sharpness in reproving the hypocrite, and the conceited and stubborn sinner, would be of unspeakable service in these unbelieving and shameless times. Now, it is your duty to imitate him in this, let your condition in the world be ever so low; for truth and virtue come against falsehood and vice with a majesty from the meanest mouth. His mildness and tenderness, towards such as transgressed through human infirmity, is also highly deserving of our imitation. You ought to take care, like him, not 'to bruise the broken reed, nor quench the smoking flax,' of a repentance as yet in its infancy, nor 'to despise the broken and the contrite heart.' As a parent, as a

master, and in many other respects, you will find this example useful to you. Again, it is your duty to imitate his love of justice, who was contented to satisfy that attribute of his Father by his own death, pursuant to his engagement from the beginning; and should not, if 'you have promised or sworn aught to your neighbour, disappoint him, though it were to your own hindrance;' but walk uprightly, and work righteousness, and speak the truth from your heart. Lastly, his amiable modesty in speaking of himself would much better become you, who fall so infinitely short of him in wisdom and goodness. If Christ could ascribe his knowledge and power to his Father, and say, 'if I bear witness of myself, my witness is nothing,' with what grace shall you set your hand to a high certificate of yourself?

You have here a perfect pattern of a good life, without a single blemish to pass on weakness and ignorance, under the shelter of many virtues, for an excellence. You see here all the passions of human nature subdued, and reduced to their proper stations and offices. You see here reason, assisted by the Divine Spirit, refined and exalted into true wisdom, and placed, where it ought to stand, in an absolute sovereignty over the heart. If you love beauty, and would desire to copy it into yourself, here is beauty in perfection placed perpetually before your eyes; in an original, so glorious, and so striking, that it is impossible for a sensible mind to behold it attentively, without growing into some resemblance of it. If you love true greatness of soul, here shines the very majesty of virtue; not in precepts, or commands, or discourses only, but in an active and living example. If you have so much goodness, as to be pleased with the triumphs of virtue, behold it here put to the severest test, and breaking out at the last with a heavenly brightness. If you are not abandoned to all sense of generosity, your soul must kindle at such an example; especially when all that was suffered in setting it, and all the goodness discovered in it, were displayed before your eyes, not out of ostentation, or to excite your wonder and applause, but to force home upon your degenerate heart, the glory, and excellence, and beauty, of holiness. There is no example so apt to make an impression on a good mind, as that which is set us by our friend in a good office; because, be-

side the pleasure we take in seeing a good action done, our gratitude, when it is done to ourselves, recommends it the more strongly to our imitation. Now all that Christ did or suffered was for you. For you the Son of God took the nature of man; for you he preached; for you he laboured; for you he died. What now will you do for him? All he requires of you is, to do your utmost to be like him; and, to assist your weakness in so good a work, he lends you his word, his sacraments, his grace, and his example; which last, as it is too excellent and perfect to be ever equalled by you, so it leaves you room to grow better, and brighter, and improve for ever by it.

It was the sin of our first parents to attempt, by a faulty imitation, or rather by emulation, to be like God; for the tempter said to Eve, 'you shall be as gods.' This, according to the real intention of that deceiver, defaced the image of God, which we had already received, and imprinted on us the likeness of the devil. But God, pitying our miserable fall, which had happened through a desire of being like him, by the very same desire schemed our recovery and restoration. To this end he took our nature on him, so that it may now be truly said, 'behold, God is become like one of us,' subject to poverty, and hunger, and cold, and death; that we may have an opportunity of becoming, like him, pure, compassionate, humble, and patient. And shall we disappoint his gracious intention? Can we be so lost to reason and gratitude?

Yes, wretched creatures that we are! few of us have any inclination to follow our blessed Lord; for he walks in the way of humility, we in that of pride; he through the cross, we through pleasures; he through poverty, and we through riches and vanity. And why do we not follow him? Because he moves upward through the steep and narrow path of affliction and self-denial. Did he lead downward through the broad way, adorned with riches, and pleasures, and pomp, and honour, we should be ready not only to walk, but run after him.

It hath been observed, by St. Ambrose, and other great men, that example hath a greater influence on us than precept. This seems to be verified by experience; for although precept is on the side of virtue, yet, as example and custom

generally sway to the contrary side, we are by that means, for the most part, engaged in a course of vice. But why will we choose out such examples, 'and follow a multitude to do evil,' when we know so well where their journey is to end, rather than follow the Lord of glory, that lovely light, that blessed guide, to those happy 'mansions' he is gone before 'to prepare for us in his Father's house?'

God, of his infinite mercy, give us grace to betake ourselves to this wiser course, through Christ Jesus our great example and Saviour; to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now, and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XLI.

CHRIST'S CRUCIFIXION CELEBRATED EVERY DAY.

PREACHED ON GOOD-FRIDAY.

ST. MARK XV. 21.

——*Woe to that man, by whom the Son of Man is betrayed.*——

THIS was spoken by our blessed Saviour of Judas; but as Abraham was 'the father of the faithful,' so Judas seems to have been the father of the unfaithful; I mean in respect to Christ, and his religion; and therefore what is here said of Judas particularly, being nevertheless delivered in general terms, may be well enough applied to, or understood of, that very numerous tribe or race, of whom he was the type and father. The 'woe' is not only denounced against him, but against them all; and 'it would have been better' for every man of them 'that he had never been born,' than that he should have lived to betray, in any sense or respect, the Saviour of the world.

As Christ, when on earth, had a natural body, through which he was liable to injuries and sufferings, so he hath still a mystical and figurative body, namely, the church;

the veay life and well-being of which depend absolutely on keeping up that spirit of piety and virtue he inspired it with. This body still renders him liable to injuries and persecutions; and he may, even at this day, be betrayed, or crucified. He hath open enemies enough to do the one, and treacherous followers in abundance to do the other.

The treatment he met with in his natural body, was an exact type throughout of that which he hath all along suffered in the mystical. In the first he was exposed in a manger, when an infant; and although notified to mankind by angels, was by men driven from his country; persecuted afterward, when he returned to it, with extreme malice; at length betrayed by one of his followers; deserted by all the rest; and crucified by his enemies. In the latter he was, from the beginning, treated with the utmost contempt, by the wise and great people of the world; and, although preached to mankind by the most undesigning and the best of men, and even by the power of God, manifested in the most astonishing miracles, yet was harrassed with ten blood ypersecutions; torn to pieces by heresies and schisms, the poisonous produce of worldly and fleshly minds; and is now, at length, deserted, or betrayed, a thousand different ways, by those who call themselves after his name; while his enemies 'crucify him afresh,' and make a jest of his sufferings.

Christ, in respect of his adversaries and followers, is in much the same circumstances and situation as when on earth. The attack made on him is artful and bitter; the defence cold and careless.

The enemies of his person and preaching were the wise, politic, and powerful persons of the time and place he lived in. He was called a king; but, as 'his kingdom was not of this world,' they treated him as a mock king, with the utmost contempt and derision; and although people seldom give themselves much trouble to oppose or suppress him whom they despise, yet they hated him for the freedom of his reproofs, for the strictness of his doctrine and morals; that is, for the good he did, and would have others to have done; and therefore persecuted him, as an enemy to themselves, because he was a friend to mankind. His mission from God was what most alarmed them; because, as their

power was either not from God, or employed against his honour and intention to the service of the devil, they could not help apprehending the most disagreeable consequences from the increase of an opposite sort of power. 'They were of this world, and of their father the devil,' and their kingdom was 'the kingdom of darkness.' But 'Christ was from above, was of the Father of lights,' and his kingdom brought with it such light, 'as reproved their evil deeds.' From hence arose the most opposite kind of contrariety. He supported his cause with truth and miracles; and they, ascribing those miracles to the devil, opposed that cause with worldly policy and power. As truth could not be refuted by reason, they were forced to use art and cunning for that purpose; and, when that also failed, bribery, false witness, violence, and murder, were called in to manage the debate. Swords, staves, scourges, crosses, were an odd sort of argument: but when an odious set of truths cannot be either answered, or resisted, those who speak them must be killed; and this will silence them effectually. There is no middle term like that which strangles or cuts the throat of an opponent.

The present adversaries of Christ, and his religion, are of the same kind, and animated with the same spirit. They leave no art untried, which their cunning can suggest, nor instrument of injury unemployed, which power hath put into their hands, to undermine or batter the cause of Christ; and both their cunning and power, although as yet limited by the public toleration given to religion, are far from being inconsiderable. As to their cunning, which long concealed itself under the mask of benevolence towards mankind, and regard to what they call true religion, it begins, now that the foundation of infidelity is sufficiently laid in the false reasonings and corrupt affections of mankind, to shew itself more openly. The freedom of thinking, so loudly called for, in order, as it was pretended, to combat popery and superstition with, appears to be no less than an unlimited licence, claimed by each libertine, to think for himself; that is, to put truth for falshood, and falshood for truth; good for evil, and evil for good; when his own peculiar schemes of pleasure, or profit, or honour, require the transposition. Men who think in order to one common good, must all think one way. But this, as it would too

much hamper a genius that aspires to an unlimited thinking, is too narrow and slavish; and therefore, under the plausible pretence of pursuing the common good in a way peculiar to himself, each of them is for sheltering his own private scheme of thought; than which nothing can be more strongly opposed to the common good of mankind, either spiritual or temporal. Many ingenious treatises of independent morality have been published within these fifty years; each overweening moraliser inventing a new system of duty, and placing obligation on a different and favourite footing of his own. These are put, by those who love to be foremost in the fashion of opinions, where their bibles were formerly placed; and are become so common, as to be admired and followed by creatures that can hardly read them. The world, being furnished with these, is in no want of revelation; and the raw divine, forgetting the word of God, and the great ties of religion, retails 'the moral beauties,' and 'the fitnesses of things,' in the pulpit. Others, under pretence of defending the Christian religion in this or that respect, have laboured in their writings, with infinite art, to run it up to absurdities and contradictions, or to make it speak against its own authority or necessity. These goodly magazines furnish matter for those talkers, who, over their wine, assault, by surprise, the half-digested principles of their loose and unwary companions; and, favoured by that opportunity, infuse a more dangerous and lasting intoxication, than that which flows from the bottle. That their declamations may penetrate the farther, they are pointed with wit and humour, borrowed from the same store; which pass as sterling arguments on such occasions, and in such a cause; though, God knows, to men in their cool senses, they are as far from wit, as reason.

As to the power of those persons, who persecute Christ in these times, it is almost as great as fortune and station can make it: it is, in a word, like the power of those who persecuted him at first. Luxury follows wealth, and vice is rather the companion, than the follower, of luxury. Now vice can never be secure or easy, till it hath fitted itself with proper principles, that is, with infidel principles. A man of sense ought to sin on principle, or not at all; for to sin against principle, is to taste but half the gout of sin. But

he who studies only to please himself, can easily bring himself to think as he pleases. A slight argument is sufficient to convince him, who goes more than half-way to meet it; nay, who, rather than stick out, will yield to his appetites, and go the whole length. A person of this sort is of no disposition to continue in, or close with, such principles, as confine him to narrow bounds, and oblige him to pursue happiness, 'through the eye of a needle.' He is a great man, his taste is exquisite, his appetites strong, his desires high and extensive, and his conscience large. He must have room; and therefore if his principles are narrow, they must burst and fall off; and such as are more lax and easy must be put on. Men who live in affluence and ease, and are given up to this world, and the enjoyment of what is here, as they have desires of different sizes, generally adopt proportionable principles; from whence it proceeds, that there are different degrees of latitude in their shemes of thinking. Some retain more, and some less, of religion; but hardly any of them will admit of more than he knows how to reconcile with the plan of life, dictated to him by his pleasures and worldly views. Now all men are pleased with their own ways of thinking, and desire to bring others over to them, or, at least, are willing to defend them; and from defending one's self, to the proselyting of others, there is but one short step. Besides, the same vanity that moves a man to despise an old or common notion, and to beat out new ones, prompts him strongly to spread those of his own invention; especially if he is any way doubtful of their truth, he can never rest thoroughly satisfied with them, till he hath tried them upon the understanding of other men; and then, if they happen to close with them, although perhaps on his recommendation, or upon motives as weak and bad as his, yet this serves to countenance his adherence to them, and he fancies they return upon him with some additional force in the rebound. The men of wealth and figure, who espouse the cause of libertinism, having the advantage of the ground, make easy conquests upon those below them. Their actions preach up infidelity; insomuch that they have no occasion, in order to increase the number of libertines, to say any more than is necessary to make those of the rank below them sensible, that they have very good reasons for being wicked. How-

ever, they are seldom content with this. They take a pleasure in shewing how clearly they see into the received errors of former times, and how easy it is for them to discover those truths that have hitherto been concealed. They do this with wit and humour enough to demonstrate any thing; and, as the behaviour of the clergy is too like that of other men, they make it most evident, from the failings of some among that order of men, that they are all perfect monsters; and that, of consequence, it is impossible they should speak one word of truth, either in or out of the pulpit. They contrive a thousand entertaining stories for this purpose; and, as to the wit necessary to turn the clergy into ridicule with, they can copy as much in half an hour into their pocket-books, from any libertine writer, as may serve them for a whole year. It requires but little reading, and no learning, to persecute Christianity through its ministers; and therefore this is the topic of the young and illiterate libertine, who can see, that a bad action done by a clergyman, refutes his religion; but cannot perceive, that a thousand good ones done, some of them perhaps by the very same clergyman, and the rest by others on whom malice can fix no imputation, redound nothing to the credit of religion. The more learned topics, on which religion may be attacked, become the province of those, who, having little to do, and being in small request among people of their own profession or employment, are always reading on the opposite side to religion, and come in time to be most able antichristians. Having but few opportunities given them of doing mischief in law, physic, or other branches of businesss, they exercise their talents on religion, and the church of Christ. All the opposers, or, I may rather say, maligners, of religion, persecute it as far as the laws of their country will permit; and though, to save appearances, and avoid the dreadful penalties inflicted by law on blasters, they give Christ his title of Saviour, and speak with some decency of his religion, before those men in power, who are known to be Christians, yet they treat both with the utmost indignity and virulence, whenever it is safe for them so to do. As far as in them lies, they use Christ as his first persecutors did. They listen to none but his accusers. They give him his titles, and call him their Saviour; but it is only by way of accusation.

'They hail him' indeed; but then 'they spit upon him. They clothe him with purple too;' but, at the same time, 'they crown him with thorns. They give him drink;' but 'it is vinegar and gall.'

Such are the enemies of Christ. Let us now see what sort of friends he hath to espouse him. They also are of the very same kind with those who followed him when on earth.

Some, observing that he produces bread in a miraculous way, and without labour, attend on him 'for the loaves.' They are very good Christians, if sitting still and eating will make a Christian. As long as either the ministry of Christ, or the laws that annex employments of profit to conformity, can afford to support the professors of Christianity, we shall have professors enough, who will come to the table of God, as it were only for spiritual food; when God, who sees their hearts, knows full well their appetites are set quite another way. There is no sort of compliment, which these parasites of religion, who only come to flatter and eat, are not ready to pay, either to God, or their country's laws, provided they may enrich themselves by so doing. It is this goodly principle that gives us all our occasional conformists, our annual or mere official communicants; whom, if you follow back from the Lord's table to their own, or to their private lives, you will find utterly divested of all religion; and not a few of them labouring to seduce others from that religion which they have been conforming with for gain. This they do without scruple or shame; yet, if they are put in mind of this scandalous practice by any body, they highly resent it, as an impeachment of their sincerity and honour. But if these are men of honour and sincerity, as perhaps the present reigning opinion concerning sincerity may be comprehensive enough to take them in, then it seems the names of things are changed, and sincerity stands for hypocrisy, and dissimulation for integrity. There is, I think, no one symptom, by which the extreme iniquity of the times we live in so clearly discovers itself as that no sort of men are more caressed and admired among us, than those who rise to the most beneficial employments in the church, by subscribing articles, and solemnly repeating creeds, which they labour, with all imaginable art and anxiety, to refute through the press, in private conversation, and in the pulpit.

A contention arose among certain of our Saviour's disciples, who should be the greatest; and, although he reproved their ambition, and told them, 'he who would be greatest among them, ought to be servant to the rest,' proposing his own example to them, 'who, being their Lord and Master, stooped nevertheless to wash their feet,' yet this contention is still kept up, and carried very high. There is an infinite struggle among all sorts of Christians for preeminence; but it is not like that among our Saviour's first disciples, in order to be uppermost on earth. The basest arts, the vilest flattery, the utmost contempt of all principle, all duty, all decency, are employed in the pursuit of this end; so opposite to the humility and contentment prescribed by our religion, and so severely branded by the reproofs, the precepts, the example, of our blessed Redeemer. What is highly hurtful to Christianity, the lowest and basest spirits often raise themselves to the highest offices; and that which ought for ever to have remained below, as it was at first, the mere lee and sediment of the church, rises to the top, and covers it with the most filthy kind of scum; which is continually increasing and thickening, by the attraction of more stuff like itself. This gives our church and our religion a most disagreeable aspect. It keeps up a perpetual ferment throughout the whole; and, for the most part, sets that only in view, which is the least fit to be seen. Now those who never look deeper than the mere surfaces of things, think all is like what they see; or, at least, are willing to think it is; because they are glad to believe the worst, and stand in need of all the wickedness of others, whether real or imputed, to countenance their own. Christianity is no more to blame for the ambition of its professors, than Christ was for that of his immediate disciples. As he reproved the pride of these, so it still condemns the vain glory of those, who, after 'renouncing the pomps and vanities of this wicked world' in their baptism, pursue and court nothing else, during their whole lives.

There were such among our Saviour's disciples, as were for 'calling down fire from heaven' to consume those, who, on a religious account, had been somewhat unkind to them; and for this piece of spiritual cruelty, they quoted the example of Elias. But our blessed Saviour turned very short

upon them, 'and rebuked them, saying, you know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them.' When Peter had, in defence of his master drawn his sword, and smote off Malchus's ear, Christ bid him put up his sword; told him force was not to be used in the cause of God; that, if it were, he could easily obtain 'twelve legions of angels,' to subdue and destroy his enemies: and that his precept, on that trying occasion, might not go without an example both of his power and pity, 'he stretched forth his hand and healed the ear of him' who was come to take away his life. Yet, notwithstanding these instances, and a great deal more to the same effect, strongly set forth in holy Scripture, there are those among Christians, who imagine God stands in need of their assistance; or, at least, would have the world believe they think so; and are for 'working the righteousness of God by their own wrath.' They will fight and mangle the flesh of other people for God: they will persecute and kill for God: they will in short, do that for God's sake, which God hath severely forbid. But what he hath commanded, namely, that they should 'do justice, and shew mercy, and walk humbly with God,' that they have no inclination to, and would rather sanctify the motions of their own malicious hearts, with the pretence and name of serving God. But this sort of zeal, if it may be so called, instead of doing honour to God, or promoting any cause of his, furnishes unbelievers with a pretence to blaspheme our religion, to which they wickedly ascribe such effects as are most opposite to its spirit and genius, and such as must be dictated by a spirit like their own; that is, by a dark and infernal spirit. The sin of persecution is very grievous; but surely the persecuting of men's bodies, though by fire and sword, is not a greater sin, than the attributing to Christianity those hardships, which men, on a religious account, have suffered at one another's hands. This is the worst of all persecutions; because its aim and tendency is to destroy that religion, by which only men may be saved: it is a wilful and cruel persecution of souls; and all under the mask of mercy. The great deceiver sends one of his instruments into the church, who takes on him the name of Christ, does a thousand the most scandalous things, and, among others,

persecutes Christians for Christ's sake; offers human sacrifices to a God of infinite mercy. Thus an hideous face is put on the most humane and amiable of all religions by this traitor; while he that set him on work hath another instrument ready to dress out this cruelty in its ugliest lights; to ascribe it to the religion professed by the traitor named; to publish it over the whole world, and lament, to all mankind, the loss of that natural benevolence, which, if we believe him, the Christian religion hath banished from the hearts of men. Such is the correspondence kept up between the enemies of Christ; who, getting within the church, are ready on all occasions to betray it; and those without, who never fail to strike in, when such openings as these are given.

We find our Saviour had disciples also, who not only slept out his glorious transfiguration, as yet insensible of the honour done him by his Father; but, what was worse, fell fast asleep likewise, when his enemies were drawing near, and both his command and safety required they should be on their guard. He roused them, and they fell asleep again, and did not awake till it was too late to render him any service. How like these are his present disciples! They take their ease, and see him, without the least concern, attacked on all sides. They see his divinity called in question; they see his saving merits denied by pretended followers of his own; they see his professed enemies building deism and atheism on this foundation, and a torrent of impiety and vice rushing in through all the wide breaches made in that building, of which he is the chief corner-stone. These things they see with the utmost tranquillity. It is charity hinders them from entering into debates with the adversaries of religion, which might breed contention; and they think it better religion should come to nothing, than that they should disturb themselves or others about it. It is prudence that shuts their mouths on the truth; while falshood freely bellows from a thousand throats, and is possessed almost of every ear. But opposition, say they, would only oblige it to raise its voice the higher. Yes, it is prudence makes 'dumb dogs,' as the prophet calls them, of all these shepherds, and hinders them from barking when the wolf approaches: but then it is only the prudence and

wisdom of this world. They see the stream of promotion and worldly prosperity running altogether in favour of the loosest principles; they see all manner of discountenance given to those who shew any warmth in defence of true religion; insomuch that zeal, even in the lowest degree, is become a crime, and the word itself begins to have an ill sound. They think it imprudent to launch out into such a tide, where they may expect to be tossed and ruffled; and therefore 'they sleep on, and take their rest.' They say to themselves, why should we be 'righteous over-much.' It is a folly to turn knight-errant for religion. Besides, there is no danger. The principles canted up, by the kindlers of this new light, are bad enough; but nobody will quit their old opinions for such novelties. There is, therefore, no need of breaking our repose with false alarms, of keeping continually on the watch, of holding up 'the shield of faith' in one hand, and 'the sword of God's word' in the other, as if there were some adversary near. As good Christians, we ought to be lovers of peace and quietness. 'The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water;' there is no knowing when it will stop. 'Where strife is, there is confusion;' and it is far from the business of a good Christian to raise confusion in the church. Therefore we will even compose ourselves and keep quiet.' 'Yet a little sleep, a little religious slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep.' Thus these worthy champions of Christ, having found that religion consists entirely in peace, and that peace is nothing but inaction and sloth, 'settle on the lees' of their own lukewarm hearts, and suffer Christianity to be destroyed, for the preservation of 'Christian charity.' An absurdity of the grossest nature; yet such as may pass well enough in a dream, and on those who are asleep.

It was not so that Judas, who betrayed our Saviour, passed his time. He was watchful enough, and came with his band of enemies to set upon Christ, just as his drowsy friends were rousing, and rubbing their eyes. The latter had taken but a small share in the agonies of their master, and now opened their eyes to see how much more vigilant he was who served the devil, than themselves, who were in the service of God. This is continually acted over and over again in the church. Those who betray the religion of

Christ, like their father Judas, are always upon the watch, and come upon it 'by stealth,' and 'in the night;' when works of darkness, and covert doings, may be best carried on. They 'bear its bag;' and, with its profits, which they appropriate to themselves, they mix the wages of treachery. It is true, they speak highly of our religion, and with some little respect of its author; yet they do almost the whole work of the adversary for him, by endeavouring to refute the divinity of our Saviour, and the satisfaction made by his death. The consequence of which is, that those who see both so strongly and frequently asserted in Scripture, looking however on both to be absurd and senseless doctrines, they quickly lay aside all respect for revelation. It is true, Christ might have been seized, and his religion may be attacked, by open enemies only; but the most expeditious and effectual way, in all such cases, is that of treachery. Accordingly those, who betray our religion, 'hail it' with a thousand encomiums; 'they kiss it' with a seeming affection for it; but point it, at the same time, to its enemies, whom they lead forward to destroy it. Where had the deist borrowed his hints and materials, if the Socinian, the Arian, and the preacher of new light, had not furnished him with them? How could any man have strode over the wide gulph between Christianity and absolute infidelity? This was too great a stretch at once; but the builders, just now mentioned, have erected a very convenient bridge, consisting of several arches, that reach from one side to the other. First, the divinity of Christ is to be disbelieved; then it is an easy matter to destroy the authority of the Scriptures, in which that doctrine is so copiously set forth: after this, the eternal law of nature may, for decency's sake, be adopted; because, as that is a law of a man's own dictating, or, at least, explaining, it will leave him at full liberty to do whatsoever his head, or heart, or any other part of his nature, more corrupt, if possible, prompts him to; that is, it will leave him a libertine and a deist. These are the men, with Judas at their head, against whom the woe in my text is denounced. These are the persons, who betray Christ's 'mystical body,' to a 'figurative cross,' erected for it by the loose and diabolical spirit of the times. These are the men, 'who dip in the dish with' Christ, often taking the fattest

bit to themselves; and, after getting all they can from him, with bellies filled at his table, go out and sell him to his most irreconcileable enemies. Had these men lived in the days of our Saviour himself, they would have done that to his person, which they now do to his church and religion; that is, they would have done what Judas did, and earned the wages of treachery then, as they now earn those of dissimulation and infidelity.

Those of Christ's disciples, who loved him most, as they were but men, being left to themselves, and struck with the terror of prisons, trials, and crosses, 'all forsook him,' and one of them forswore him. It is thus he is deserted in these times, by the generality of his followers; although all they have to fear, who would oppose the present prevailing heresies, and deceitful practices, of our false teachers, is very inconsiderable. They might miss of promotion; they might be out of the fashion; they might make themselves enemies; but still their persons and their fortunes would be safe; and therefore their suffering infidelity to triumph, without opposition, is deserting the cause of Christ, when they have little or nothing to fear in its defence; is sacrificing their master to slavish fears, and mere worldly views.

Thus is our blessed Master deserted by some, betrayed by others, and crucified afresh on all occasions. There is no need of one day in the year to commemorate his crucifixion, since our crying sins act that tragedy over again, and repeat it every day. If our lives and conversations are of such a nature as to do the utmost dishonour to our profession; if they only serve to expose religion to the reproaches and insults of infidels; if they 'put Christ to open shame' before his enemies; it must then be owned we keep this anniversary as Jews, and not as Christians. The Jews and Romans looked upon Christ as a deceiver, and therefore they crucified him. But we know him to be the son of God, and our Redeemer, yet do the same. Thus we 'fill up the measure of their iniquity.' By their putting him to death, they fulfilled the prophecies, and were unwillingly the instruments of redemption to mankind. But our treachery and wickedness, so far as concerns ourselves, defeat all the ends of his coming, and give the lie to the prophecies, and our own professions. He chose the death he suf-

fered at Jerusalem; and therefore 'power was given to his enemies from above.' But the death we put him to, is utterly against his will, and against the power of that Holy Spirit given us from above, to prevent our acting so unnatural a part. We are therefore rebels against God, as well as traitors to our Saviour, and destroyers of ourselves.

Let us not carry the cross of Christ only in order to nail him to it again. Let us rather crucify our corruptions and sins. Let us sacrifice 'the old man' to him who 'offered up himself for us.' Let us 'put on the new man,' and, by a new life and conversation, try to adorn our profession, to do honour to our infinite benefactor, and add strength to his body, by the accession of so many sound and wholesome members. If we really belong to Christ, and are thankful for what he hath done and suffered, let us no more 'grieve his Holy Spirit,' nor pierce his precious body with our sins. Let one Judas, and one crucifixion, suffice. Let Jews, and pagans, and infidels of all sorts, vilify his character, and deride his sufferings; but let us, who call ourselves by his blessed name, refute their cavils by our virtues; and shew, that he hath been indeed a Saviour to us, by delivering us from a sinful life, from an accusing conscience, and from a fearful death. Thus shall we offer the best argument in the world for our religion, and the most ignorant professor of it may put to silence its most artful and subtile opposers.

May God enable his word to produce these fruits in our hearts; and may he be graciously pleased to accept of them, through the merits of our blessed Saviour; to whom, with God the Father, and God the Holy Ghost, be all glory, and honour, all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XLII.

THE CUNNING MAN.

JEREMIAH IX. 5.

They will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth. They have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity.

MAN owes it to God, as his master, and to himself as a rational creature, so to direct, as far as in him lies, the main scope of his life, that, when he is summoned to appear before God, he may not find occasion to reproach himself, at least, with a general neglect of such opportunities, as God hath bestowed on him, to answer the true ends of living, and to promote his own real happiness.

Whether these two important purposes may be best answered by wisdom or cunning, or whether cunning and deceit may be allowed to have any share in such a work as this, of which God is to be the judge, will be worth our while to inquire. And that this inquiry may set out on clear and demonstrative grounds, it will be our business to begin with stating the true distinction between wisdom and cunning, and between their effects respectively.

There are but three things necessary to make a wise man; the first is, a clear and certain knowledge of his chief good, of the main end and happiness for which his nature was intended. If he neither knows in what his happiness consists, nor where it is placed, it is impossible, let his knowledge in other respects be what it will, that he should shape the course of his life, or aim his endeavours, at an end worthy of a reasonable being. Should he take his happiness to consist in that which it does not, he may employ the whole force of the strongest understanding, and the best abilities, in the pursuit of his own misery and ruin; at least he may lose himself and his labour in false appearances of good, or unhappily lay out both on good so inconsiderable, as to have no title to the main drift of his endeavours.

The second thing necessary to make a wise man, is a clear knowledge of the easiest and surest means whereby his true happiness may be arrived at. If he knows not this, the bare knowledge of his true happiness will only serve to make him the more miserable. A just title to a great estate is a most vexatious misfortune to any man, if he neither knows how to prove it, nor to get into possession.

The third thing necessary to make a wise man, is strength and resolution steadily to employ the means, without which, the important end he aims at cannot be attained to. If he wants this, his knowing wherein his happiness consists, and whereby it may be obtained, can answer no other purpose than to torment and afflict him. He is like the cripple at the pool of Bethesda, who eagerly desiring the use of his limbs, and knowing his cure lay in the water, could not however find means to get into the water, before it was too late.

The man, who knows not where his happiness is placed, cannot so much as direct his face towards it. He who knows this, but is ignorant of the means, cannot even set out on a journey towards it. And although he knows both perfectly well; yet, if the road, through these means, should be long and difficult, or he lazy and irresolute, it were as well, or better, for him to be wholly ignorant.

He who knows not what his true happiness consists in, is an ignorant man. He who neither knows it, nor will suffer himself to be taught it, is a stupid and obstinate man. He who knows it, but prefers somewhat else to it, and aims the main of his endeavours at the attainment of that somewhat, is a fool. He who makes this absurd preference, and chiefly labours for the attainment of something, in which his main happiness does not really consist; nay, who, not content with erring thus fundamentally against his own knowledge, pursues, as his chief good, the inferior end he proposes, not by the fair and natural means that lead to it, but by short cuts, and disingenuous arts, is a cunning man; that is, not only a fool, but a knave.

But still, more perfectly to conceive the nature of cunning, it will be proper to take it in another light. Nothing serves so clearly to distinguish it from true wisdom, as its remarkable short-sightedness. Cunning, in the conduct of our lives, consists mainly in a rash attachment to ends, and

a ready invention of means, without sufficient judgment in the choice; and, to finish its character, it is always misled by a wrong bias of the heart and affections, which proves too strong for its judgment. Wisdom, on the contrary, consists in a judgment strong enough to lead the heart, to choose a right end, and to find proper means for the accomplishment of that end. Cunning can easily lay such a scheme as shall be successful in bringing about a particular end, and so far may assume the appearance of wisdom. But if the end is foolish, and the means dangerous, it proves itself to be only cunning. True wisdom looking farther, chooses such ends as are good, and takes such measures as prove successful, without running at the same time blindly into such mischiefs, as all the good, expected from the end proposed, is not sufficient to balance. The picking one's neighbour's pocket, or otherwise tricking him out of his property, shews cunning, because it argues dexterity and quickness of invention; but as it may end in disgrace, or death, it argues but little wisdom. He is but an ingenious fool, who shews much subtilty in gaining a point, which prevents his carrying another point of much greater consequence to him; and, for the present, involves him in difficulties or dangers enough to outweigh the mistaken satisfaction he finds in his immediate success. This man's subtilty is but mere folly, and his prosperity misfortune. Cunning may conceitedly compliment itself with the name and title of wisdom; but nevertheless is so far from any real affinity with it, that its very nature consists in short-sightedness, in want of consideration and discernment. The wise man might sometimes stoop to cunning and deceit, were it not for the soundness of his judgment, and the uprightness of his heart, which always direct him to schemes, whereof he can never have reason to repent. And the cunning man might rise at length to wisdom, were it not for the narrowness of his understanding, that confines his schemes to partial views; and for the corrupt disposition of his heart, which puts it out of his power to use the little understanding he hath. He proposes to himself a certain end, such as the riches, the pomps, and pleasures of this world, which, if obtained, he thinks would make him happy. Here his folly shews itself to be of the grossest kind; for if he knew any thingof it himself or the world, he could never

be so widely mistaken. Besides, being either ignorant of the right means to attain his end, or, through a depravity of heart, unwilling to employ them; he hath recourse to indirect and sinister means; which, if they fail him, he is disappointed in the very first necessary step, on which his leading scheme of happiness depends: but if they succeed, and raise him to the wealth and grandeur he at first wished for, this at least they cannot do, without giving him continual anxiety and remorse, and putting him to infinite pains. And, after all, he finds there is no stopping contented at the height he is raised to; greater heights begin to tempt his avarice and ambition, which are now habituated to a greater strength than ever, and become inveterate. His pursuit is, in a manner, but beginning, where he hoped it would end. 'What hath pride profited him? Or what good have riches with his vaunting brought him,' if he is to be at the expense of new labours and anxieties, new villanies and oppressions, new dangers and remorses? However, he goes on, and prosperity, we will suppose, attends him to the last; yet here he is disappointed in the last step of his scheme; for he aimed at happiness, and missed it. He hath not got enough; he hath either wanted health, or heart, or time, at least, to enjoy what he did get. He hath made a long voyage through a tempest of passion and bustle. He is fatigued, spattered, broken; and though he may have made a gainful trip of it for the fool or villain that shall come after him, yet he hath got nothing for himself. He hath laid out his time, his talents, and his labours, in 'sowing the wind, and reaping the whirlwind;' and death gives the harvest to be gathered in by others.

From what hath been said it appears, that the chief good, or grand happiness of man, follows not the success of worldly schemes, nor lies in the road of cunning and deceit. This being the case, it must be the business of him, who would be wise, to seek elsewhere for his true happiness, to find out the proper means by which it may be arrived at, and then to set himself, with all possible resolution and steadiness, to the pursuit and application of those means.

In this most important of all inquiries, in the attainment of this branch of knowledge, which alone is necessary to us, the Divine Wisdom leaves us not to our own blindness, but

is itself our instructor. The holy Scriptures teach us true wisdom, and set before us the eternal enjoyment of God, as our great and true happiness; they propose piety, and honesty, and a holy life, as the only means whereby it may be attained to; and, that nothing may be wanting to creatures of so little strength and resolution, give us all the encouragement and assistance that are necessary to a successful application of these means.

Yet there are men so blinded by their passions and prejudices, as to renounce both the end and the means. There are others, who, although they receive both, yet unwittingly set other ends before this in their hearts; as appears by the ruling bent of their thoughts and labours. But, as if God had cursed their unworthy choice, pursue the worldly end they prefer, by such means, as either lead them wide of that end, or at least of the happiness they hope for in that end. And what is still worse, they miss of the great end set before them by our religion; for that is never to be accomplished, but when it is made the chief end; whereas they make it only a second or bye end. Being thus disappointed at once of all their purposes, they find reason, when it is too late, to blush for, and bewail, their unhappy folly. They have neglected God and religion, to pursue, through their whole lives, the phantoms of riches and grandeur, by low arts and base stratagems; and now are taught, by the approach of death, what they would not earlier hear from Solomon, 'that shame is the promotion of fools.' They were taught, but would not follow, 'the wisdom from above, which is pure, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.' No: they chose to be directed by 'that wisdom which cometh from beneath, which is earthly, sensual, devilish.'

What a mistaken reproach were their neighbours guilty of, in calling these men selfish! Surely they did not know what self was. And what is self? This, you will say, cannot be a question; since the whole world, with all its business and bustle, is taken up about it. Is it possible we should not know what we dress, cook, cheat, traffic, and in a word, undertake all we do, and undergo all we suffer, for? Certainly it must be our bodies; for, in those, all we are so very anxious about plainly terminates. No: it cannot be our bodies, for they are never long the same; and we shall have

self, when we shall have no bodies. Hence it appears, that the dresser, the drinker, and 'the riotous eater of flesh,' know nothing of themselves. Surely then self must be placed in the gratifications of our passions and affections. By no means; for if it were, each of us should have a different sort of self, and a different kind of happiness; and, what is most surprising, should, in a great measure, find himself without him. The amorous would find himself in his mistress; the ambitious in applause; the covetous in riches. Nay, as each passion of any particular man took its turn to domineer over him, he must vary himself. What then? Is that rational creature, that wise being, man, ignorant of that which he is toiling, and running in score with his conscience for? Is he not labouring for himself? So far from it, that the poor blind wretch is using his utmost endeavours to undo himself, and hath no more than a mere apparition of himself in view. What then is the true self? It is the soul. What! is that neglected unknown thing the true self? Yes: and, although so much despised, hath a title, which might easily be made good, to an eternal infinite self-interest. Good God! how do we mistake the object of our affection and care! the centre of all our intentions, actions, enjoyments, sufferings, and interests! surely we are beside ourselves. He who lies, cheats, and deceives, for his body and his passions, is miserably deceived himself, is the most stupid sort of bubble; for he falls into a net of his own spreading, into a pit of his own digging.

He is not less grossly deceived in another matter of equal importance to him. It may seem very strange, but it is as true, that he knows no material difference between a short space of time, and eternity; as appears by his making little or no provision but for the present. It is plain, however, that wisdom cannot consist in consulting the happiness of the present; because there is but one instant that can be called so, which, before we can well provide for, passes; and another, which we have not provided for, advances into its place, and becomes present. Time and opportunity move upon a rapid wing; and therefore they must be shot flying, by aiming our care and concern at some point considerably before them, that we may strike them in a point they are not yet arrived at. The future, then, is what the wise man

regards and consults; and he is the wiser, the farther down into futurity he extends his care. He who provides for to-morrow, is wiser than him who only provides for to-day; and both are outdone in wisdom by him, who makes provision for that day, which will be to-morrow; when to-morrow will be to-day. This rule stretches itself to weeks, months, years, ages, and eternity. As eternity is to a day, so is his wisdom who provides for eternity, to his who provides only for to-morrow. What a fool then is he, who, by unworthy arts, and deceitful practices, provides for to-morrow at the expense of eternity!

These mistakes about time and eternity will be best enforced by a story. A certain gentleman, whom for the present, I will call Luscinus, when he came of age, found himself possessed of a pretty estate, yielding about a thousand pounds a year, and also of a parcel of ground adjoining, which consisted of near two hundred acres. But his right in this latter was by a lease for a term of years, of which there were only twenty unexpired. A passion for improving came to him with his inheritance, and put him immediately upon building and planting. Although his own estate afforded an hundred fine situations, he pitched on a very indifferent place in his lease, because it pleased his particular fancy; and there he built and planted, till he had almost run out his whole patrimony. All that can be said for his prudence in this matter, is, that, having got a cunning draftsman, to forge him a lease renewable for ever, of the lands on which he was improving, he talked every where of his undeterminable title; and even to the gentleman under whom he held, about renewing, upon the expiration of one of his pretended lives. His landlord, observing the progress he made in his improvements, did not, for reasons that may be guessed at, flatly dispute his title; he only put him off from time to time, with saying, that his renewal was, for the present, a thing no way material, and might be done any time. At length, the term of the real lease ran out, and a suit at law being commenced, to try the strength of the forged one; one of Luscinus's witnesses, whose hand had been procured by money, for money discovered the forgery. This outed Luscinus both of his improvements, which cost him almost all he had, and of his reputation. What a fool was Lus-

cinus! said his landlord, for running out an estate, that was his and his heirs for ever, on a tenure for twenty years! and yet (can you believe it?) he was in another respect, a greater fool than Luscinus was in this; for when he had an eternal tenure of happiness in the next life, he ran it out to improve his wealth, and promote his pleasure, in this, of which he had only a temporary tenure; and this expiring sooner than he expected, landed him a bankrupt in the other world.

Did mankind consider, wherein their true seft-interest consists, or did they know how to balance an eternal, against a temporal interest, we should have a much wiser and honester world to deal with; all sorts of business would not be clogged with such an endless train of tricks and villanies; public affairs might be carried on without jobs, faction, party, and oppression; and the laws might have their due course, without misinterpretation or evasion, did we take our great interest to lie in another world, and to be at the disposal of an infinitely wise and just Being. Instead of grossly prevaricating with each other, almost in every word, 'we should speak every one truth with his neighbour;' instead of ungratefully forgetting the kindness, or basely abusing the confidence, of a friend, we should be a rock for the one to rest on, and a fruitful soil for the other to sow in; we should not flatter him to his face, whom we rail at behind his back, did we believe that God can see and remember; we should not smile and stab; we should not embrace like Joab, and kiss like Judas, when in our hearts we carry only treachery and murder.

Were eternity uppermost in our thoughts, we should not so often hear God called on to attest a lie; we should not so often see men solemnly subscribing, and declaring, for principles they dispute, preach, and write, against, in order sacrilegiously to seize on that wealth, which was bestowed on the church, to promote the blessed cause of truth and honesty; we should either hear of no controversies about religion, or, at least, should not have the mortification to see them carried on with fulsome cant, and imprudent equivocations; we should not see one church cruelly oppressing, or basely undermining, another; as if God could not support his own cause, without truckling to the devil for as-

sistance. Will God finally prosper a religious party, that hath recourse to detestable hypocrisy, like that of Jeroboam, who, under the pretence of conveniency, introduced schism and idolatry; or like that of Herod, who asked the wise men, where Christ was born, that he might go and worship him, when he wanted nothing else but an opportunity to destroy him?

It is a glorious character of a man, that he hath a tongue free from guile, and an heart filled with integrity. What a despicable wretch must that be, who cannot with safety be either believed or trusted? If honesty is the best, because it is the easiest, the safest, and the most honourable, policy; deceit or chicane must be the worst; because it cannot be carried on without a world of cookery and management; because, when all is done, it is still in danger of being detected; and because, if it is, it renders the contriver of it infamous in the eyes of men, who was odious in the eyes of God before.

The properties of deceit ought to make us detest the very notion of it, whenever we find it in others. The first property, by which it distinguishes itself, is, that it can never be employed with success, but for a wicked purpose. This demonstrates a dark and deep malignity, so riveted in its very nature, that to eternity it can never be separated from it, even in thought. Its next property is folly, which also makes an essential part of its nature; but of this enough already. Its third property is cowardice. If a man had true resolution and bravery, he would never, in the most oppressive distress, stoop to base arts for relief; he would rather die a martyr to honesty. It is only because a man hath not the courage to look oppression or adversity in the face, that he turns his dastardly mind to the author of falsehood for protection. The fourth property of deceit is slavishness. This we may expect to find, where dissimulation and cowardice have laid a foundation for it. A man conscious of deceit in himself, knows he cannot successfully pursue such schemes as his, if he is not prepared to bear a great deal from others. And if he is sensible his falsehood is known to the world, he is then forced to truckle, and take patiently the most contemptuous treatment that can be given him. As he hath no honour, he cannot expect to be used with any ceremony. The hu-

mility of the best Christian will not stoop so low, as the servility of a knave can do. The last property of deceit I shall mention, is flattery. A deceitful man uses this for two purposes; in the first place, to prevent the harshness, with which he fears to be handled; and, in the next, to wriggle himself into the hearts of such people as he hath a design on; whether his design is some shrewd trick he is scheming against themselves, or that he intends to make them his instruments to impose on others. He hath always in readiness a thousand soothing things to tickle your ears with; and, if he takes you to be a coxcomb, he will daub you with the grossest praises, face to face, and lay on the scurf so thick, that it will be difficult for you to see you are a man through it. And yet, if you are a man, that is, if you are a rational creature, so nauseous is the mess he makes you swallow, that the stomach of your vanity, if it is not very strong, will hardly be able to keep it down.

If you do not already know this sort of villain, I will tell you how to distinguish him by his picture. When he hath a design on you, he comes crouching, and bowing, and smiling; but his smiles leer a little towards cunning. His eye, repressed by consciousness, is turned downward. He seldom looks straight in your face. If his eye at any time meets yours, it is somewhat aside, while his face is not directly towards you. When he begins to speak, he beats round and round the bush; makes long preambles to the business he is going to touch on; feels how your pulse beats, by distant hints; and draws at length towards the matter by the most artful preparations; working himself into your heart by flattery, and into your judgment by insinuation. Every thing about him is made to co-operate with his tongue; for, as Solomon observes, 'he winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers.' When you meet with a man that answers to this sketch, look to yourself. 'Though he humble himself,' says the son of Sirach, 'and go crouching, yet take good heed and beware of him. Set him not by thee, lest, when he hath overthrown thee, he stand up in thy place. Who will pity a charmer that is bitten with a serpent? For a while, he will abide with thee, but if thou begin to fall, he will not tarry. If adversity come upon thee, thou shall find him there

first; and though he pretend to help thee, yet shall he undermine thee. He will shake his head, and clap his hands, and whisper much, and change his countenance.'

There is another kind of dissembler, in comparison of whom, he I have been speaking of, is a mere Nathanael, without guile; I mean him, who conceals a conscience that sticks at nothing, under the disguise of an open countenance, a frank air and address, with sometimes even a dash of bluntness or simplicity. This impostor is too refined to be found out by any thing, but repeated trials; and therefore is the most dangerous of all deceivers. As he can give himself an appearance so contrary to his real nature, so he can give a shew of plausibility, if not of strict honesty, to the vilest designs. You can hardly be so covetous, but he will chouse you; hardly so wise, but he will over-reach you; and hardly so honest, but he will make you his instrument in doing mischief. If you have not a keen penetration, and a most delicate sense of honour, it will be a gross piece of knavery indeed, that he will not, by some means or other, and in some measure, make you a party to; especially if he serves the faction you affect, and may merit his interest for you another time. If you give ground, he clenches you over a bottle; you get drunk together; and then you are a honest man, he is a honest man; you are staunch friends, and the job you are joined in, is a very honest worthy piece of work. During your familiarity with so open a man, you cannot help being open too; by which means he will worm himself into your secrets, and then you are his slave. But you will find he is at liberty; for although you should have helped to get him a church or a bridge to build, or some other profitable piece of public work; or even, although you should, with a puking conscience, have done his job for him on either jury, he will sell you and your secrets to your adversary, as soon as he can find his account in betraying you.

Would to God I could so speak of this infernal vice, as to make it thoroughly odious to such as do not yet sufficiently abhor it in themselves! Where shall I get a colour, deep, dark, and vile enough, to daub its filthy picture? If I compare it with other vices, they appear almost virtues beside it. Contentiousness hath a false bravery, incontinence a false gallantry, drunkenness a shew of good humour

and generosity, to boast of. Detraction may cover itself under the appearance of abhorrence for the vices of mankind; but cannot do this, till deceit helps it on with its cloak. As for pride, oppression, and cruelty, they carry with them a certain frightful air, yet they look somewhat grand and lordly. But deceit is the property only of the lowest and the most abject soul. It cannot subsist, but in the dark, nor effect its scandalous purposes, but by means the most base and shameful. As it is a maxim, that the corruption of that which is best in itself, is the worst of all corruptions; so deceit, which is the very debauchery of sense and understanding, is the worst sort of depravation. It is the noblest faculty of the soul, the inlet of faith and grace, the feature, that gives humanity a resemblance of God, degenerated into cunning; that vile instrument of sin, that monstrous distortion of reason, that detestable, that horrible image of the grand deceiver.

Deceit then is the most despicable and odious turn of mind, that ever disgraced the nature of man. If the other vices (for it enters deeply into them all but one or two) were to pay it back the deformity they borrow from it, they would cease to be so abominable as they are, and many of them would dwindle down to mere infirmities. How comes it then to pass, that no vice should be so common? How shall we account for it, that deceit should be the most universally detested, and yet the most universally practised, of all vices? The true answer is, avarice, ambition, lust, the reigning vices of the age, cannot be conceived, cannot be born, cannot be brought to maturity, or execution, without it. These other vices can never want an instrument to work with, a cloak to hide in, nor a devil to encourage them, while they have deceit to succour them.

Hence it is, that this vice, though so odious in itself, is not hated, though so despicable, is not despised, as it ought to be; but, from being often practised, comes to be countenanced; and, from being countenanced, to be encouraged and abetted. The greatest persons among us, are not ashamed to take a known villain by the hand; although they are sensible, that in so doing, they give a vogue to that vice, which, of all others, they ought, as Christians, as honest men, as gentlemen, to be ashamed to encourage. Peo-

ple indeed will rail at the trickster, and make sport with his character; but this is all: for, in the commerce of the world, his falsehood is so much needed by one, makes him so like another, and his flattery goes down so sweetly with all, that he meets with surprising toleration. That villain must be of the deepest dye, and carry the most glaring brand in his forehead, who cannot make a shift to pass muster pretty well in such an age and country as this What is the world but a stage, where we rarely meet with one, who wears his own face or garb, or is what he appears to be? This indeed might make a mere farce of life, were it not that the plots are serious, and the cheats real; and that there are too many deep and melancholy scenes interwoven with the rest; insomuch that, were a man only to look on, he would find reason to weep with the one philosopher, as well as laugh with the other. It is here, as on other stages, that if we meet with a man who wears no mask nor disguise, he is generally some one of those low creatures, who shares not in the plot, and what passes, but only makes his appearance to sweep the stage, or snuff the candles.

There are some, who allow themselves the use of cunning and deceit, because they see the like in Rebecca, Jacob, and some other persons of high reputation in Scripture. But is every action applauded, that is not reproved, in history? Or, if a good man shall blemish an upright life with one or two ill actions, shall another extort a licence from thence to practise the like himself, all his days?

Others think, because God commanded the Israelites tc spoil the Egyptians, and seize the land of Canaan, they may, with impunity, by fraud or oppression, fleece all they deal with. But can they produce the grant, by which God the proprietor of all things, hath made over to them the property in other people's goods? Are they all Israelites? Or are all the rest of the world Egyptians, and Canaanites?

A third sort, observing how St. Paul delivered himself from persecution, by raising a dissention among his enemies, upon declaring himself a Pharisee, and noting the use of such stratagems on some other occasions, take this for a sufficient warrant, to use the basest arts for the vilest purposes. But did not St. Paul tell the truth, when he called himself a Pharisee? And did he say it for any other pur-

pose, but to relieve an innocent man from persecution and cruelty? If St. Paul was, on this occasion, as wise as a serpent, was he not also as harmless as a dove? Will this justify the man, who imitates the serpent in things detested by the dove? It was in this manner that the devil tempted our Saviour with Scripture. He who hath found the way to tempt himself by the word of God, needs no devil to teach him dissimulation.

A man inclinable to deceive those he deals with, would willingly deceive himself into an opinion, that, if God cannot approve of, he will at least wink at, the use of cunning. But he should consider, that as God neither will deceive, nor can be deceived, so he will not suffer himself to be served with deceit. If he did, the devil might be his best servant still. But the case is quite otherwise; for God expressly forbids us 'to go beyond, or defraud, one another;' he requires that we should 'do justice,' and 'serve him in spirit, and in truth.' He that would please God, must serve him according to the scheme and principles by which he proposes to govern the world; for such as the master is, such must be the servant. Now God, in the government of the world, hath appointed certain ends, to which he would have us direct ourselves, on all occasions; and certain means, by which he would have us pursue those ends. Of all those ends, there is not one that is not purely good. Of all those means, there is not one that is not strictly just and honest. Of those only will he approve; those only will he bless; 'for the judge of all the earth will,' not only 'do right' himself, but see that it be done by his subjects; and, if they will presume to do otherwise, 'vengeance is his, and he will repay.'

The grand and final end he sets before us, is our own eternal happiness. The only means of arriving at this end, are piety, honesty, and a holy life. To propose any other end, inconsistent with this, as the chief end; or to depend on any other means, of a contrary nature to those, as pointing out a shorter or easier way, is gross folly, is horrible presumption, and must end in eternal ruin.

Can deceit be means of happiness? Surely if it is, there is no God, or he is not good. But if there is a righteous judge, who sees all we think, speak, or do, what terms can that man expect from him, who keeps his fair side for the

eyes of men, and that which is foul and detestable for the Searcher of hearts; who, having two faces, one resembling a Christian, and the other resembling the devil, turns his Christian face to men, that he may deceive them, and his diabolical to God, that he may insult him? Is he stupid enough, with all his long reach of subtlety and cunning, to scheme his happiness on a plan like this? If he trusts to so wild a thought, let the word of God undeceive him.

'The triumphing of the wicked,' saith Zophar, 'is short, and the joy of an hypocrite but for a moment. Though his excellency mount up to the heaven, and his head reach unto the clouds; yet he shall perish for ever, like his own dung: they which have seen him, shall say, Where is he? He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night. He hath swallowed down riches, and shall vomit them up again. That which he laboured for, shall he restore, and shall not swallow it down: according to his substance, shall the restitution be. In the fulness of his sufficiency, he shall be in straits: every hand of the wicked shall come upon him. While he is about to fill his belly, God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him, and shall rain it upon him while he is eating. The heaven shall reveal his iniquity, and the earth shall rise up against him.' 'What is the hope of the hypocrite,' saith Job, 'though he hath gained? Will God hear his cry, when trouble cometh upon him? If his children be multiplied, it is for the sword; and his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread. Those that remain of him shall be buried in death, and his widow shall not weep. Though he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay, he may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver. And what is the hope of the hypocrite, when God taketh away his soul? He shall lie down, but he shall not be gathered. Terrors take hold of him as waters; a tempest stealeth him away in the night. For God shall cast upon him, and not spare: he would fain flee out of his hand. Men shall clap their hands at him, and shall hiss him out of his place.' Dreadful sentence!

Blessed Lord, be graciously pleased, by the assistance of thy Holy Spirit, so to purify and turn our hearts, that, when

we shall stand before thee in judgment, thou mayest 'impute no iniquity to us, nor find in our spirits any guile.' Grant this, we beseech thee, for the sake of Christ Jesus our Saviour; to whom, with God the Father, and God the Holy Ghost, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XLIII.

THE GOSPEL PROVED TO THE UNLEARNED.

ST. MATT. XI. 5.

The poor have the gospel preached to them.

WHEN John the baptist, who was 'then in prison, had heard the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?' In answer to this, our Saviour does not bear witness of himself, but says, 'Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.' Here he appeals to the 'works which his Father had given him to finish,' to those very works, which the prophets had foretold he should do, and had by that means made them the sure marks and signs of his mission. And what could be so sure a sign and proof of its divinity, as miracles wrought to fulfil prophecies delivered many ages before? Miracles alone had been a sufficient attestation to the rational and candid; but prophecies so old, promising miracles, which are the most unlikely events, nay, specifying the particular kind of miracles, and clearly fulfilled in the open actual performance of those very miracles, give a proof sufficient, one would think, to convince the most unbelieving minds. Concerning this work, in particular, of 'preaching the gospel to the poor,' Isaiah had prophesied in two places. In the sixty-first chapter he introduces Christ thus speaking, 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath appointed me

to preach good tidings (or the gospel) to the meek. He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.' Again, in the ninth chapter, speaking of the wisdom Christ should bestow on the ignorant, he says, 'The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.'

That we may perceive this to be a very distinguishing mark of our Saviour's mission, we must consider, that, at his coming, the rich, and the great ones of the world had engrossed to themselves almost all the philosophy and divinity then in vogue; that they were extremely vain of their learning, because it distinguished them from the vulgar; and that they generally made a secret of it, and kept it to themselves. The philosophers taught for hire the children of the wealthy. The priests of the heathen gods taught nothing; and those of them that probably knew most of true religion, such as the Egyptian, the Samothracian, and the Athenian priests, made a profound mystery of what they knew, and would not discover their rites and principles, but upon the most dreadful oaths of secrecy.

Matters were not on a much better footing among the Jews. The schools of the rabbies were open only to such as could afford to give themselves somewhat of human learning before they entered, and were able afterward to reward them for their instructions; and, what was worse, both here and in the synagogues, where they read the Scriptures to the people, they thrust in between the light of God's word, and the understanding of their hearers, the dark cloud of their own fanciful and superstitious refinements, and 'made the commandments of God of none effect, by teaching for doctrines the traditions of men.'

When things were at this pass, our Saviour began to preach the gospel, that is, the saving knowledge of the true God, and the true religion, with such a simplicity and plainness, as made it intelligible, and with such power, in parables, and pithy sayings, as made it affecting to the minds of the most ignorant. That they understood with their minds the truth, and felt in their hearts the force of what he preached, is plain, from the greatness of his success, and

from the testimony they gave him, that 'never man spake as he spake,' and that he 'had the words of eternal life.'

To all this it is objected by libertines, that persons so ignorant could not be proper judges of what he taught them, had not skill to weigh the force of his arguments, nor sense and taste to distinguish between what was excellent, or contemptible, in his discourses; and that, whatever the common people might have done in those days, they cannot in these have a rational conviction, that Christianity is a divine revelation, because they cannot learnedly trace its authorities, nor weigh the arguments for or against the purity of the Scriptures.

The first part of this objection is easily answered. The disciples of our Saviour, it is true, were, most of them, ignorant men; but they could see and hear, and had common sense, as well as other men. As they had the use of their eyes and ears, they could read or hear the prophecies concerning Christ, and could perceive his miracles; and, as they had common sense, they could be judges of the agreement, or disagreement, between such prophecies and miracles. Their common sense taught them also how to reason justly on his miracles, independently of their prophecies, and rightly to conclude, that 'he who did such things was from God.' Could the best disputant at the bar, or elsewhere, reason better, than the poor man, who, having been born blind, was miraculously blessed by our Saviour with the perfect use of his eyes? The very learned Pharisees were stupid enough to blame our Saviour for working this gracious miracle on the sabbath day. And the Jews, 'having found the man,' and, pretending to great piety, said, 'Give God the praise; we know, that this man is a sinner: We know that God spake unto Moses: As for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.' The man answered, 'Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began it was not heard, that any man opened the eyes of the blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.' Thus reasoned all the disciples of our Saviour; and who could have reasoned better? It was a honour to rabbi Gamaliel,

that, of all the learned Jewish council, he alone was able to reason half as well. Their common sense also was sufficient to let them into the meaning of arguments so glaringly strong, and doctrines so clear and plain, as those with which their Master entertained them. Besides, howsoever ignorant they were, when they first gave ear to his instructions, it was far otherwise with them by the time he left them; for it was his custom to clear up all their mistakes, and fully to explain to them the darker parts of his discourses. As to their taste, it was not indeed fitted to the flowers of rhetoric, nor had they any occasion for such a taste; their Master neither deigning to deal in such tinsel, nor using art, like one who intends to impose on his hearers; but, as they were plain men, they had an excellent taste for plain sense and sound reason; nay, and even for that divine oratory which shone in the parables, and other parts of their Master's discourses, by which he proposed to strike their imaginations, and warm their hearts.

The latter part of this libertine objection strikes at the present times; and would persuade us, that the unlearned part of the world cannot, in these latter ages, rationally believe in Christ. This concerns us more than the former, and therefore I purpose to lay out the remaining part of this discourse in shewing, by a few arguments, out of many that might be employed to the same end, that the ignorant part of the world still have sufficient reasons for embracing the Christian religion, that is, that 'the poor still have the gospel preached to them' with arguments and motives strong enough for their conviction and reformation, if they will attend to them.

The most ignorant man, if he thinks at all on the subject, must be satisfied, that, without religion and the fear of God, no man can be brought to live a good life; and that, without living a good life, no man can be happy.

Upon reflection he will also perceive, that the laws of men are of no use nor force, if not backed by the laws of God; that magistrates will be unjust and oppressive, and subjects rebellious and ungovernable, if they are not religious; that no evidence can be had without oaths, nor oaths without religion; and consequently that society, out of which mankind cannot subsist, cannot itself subsist without religion.

Having proceeded so far, it is easy for him to see, that, necessary as religion is to every single mortal in particular, and to civil government in general, men cannot have the true religion, if they be not 'taught of God.' This he must conclude, as soon as ever he considers the atheism into which many philosophers, the superstition into which all the rest, and the horribly wicked and diabolical principles of religion into which all the barbarous nations of the world have ran, and still do run, for want of Divine Revelation.

And farther, when he considers, that he and all other men have provoked the displeasure of God, by many and gross offences; that a bare repentance, which can only make a man obedient for the time to come, whereas God hath a right to the obedience of his whole life, cannot atone for his past sins; that the prayers of other men, who are unworthy to be heard for themselves, and the sacrifice of beasts, of his children, of all he hath, are still less capable of making such atonement, or appeasing the just anger of God at his sins; when, I say, he considers these things with due attention, he must be under very sensible, and very dreadful apprehensions about the safety of his soul, and therefore earnestly desirous to find out, whether God hath, in reality, provided any other more rational terms of forgiveness, or more efficacious sacrifices for sin, whereby he may be assured of pardon on repentance.

With such a foundation laid, common sense will put him on inquiring, whether God hath at any time given to mankind such a religion as answers his wants. And he will be the more apt to do this, when he reflects, that he was made by that infinitely beneficient Being, who cannot but will the virtue and happiness of his creature; and that in all nations some kind of atonement, or commutation for sin, hath been offered up, as that for which forgiveness was expected by the offender; which shews, that either the notion of an atonement is natural, or that it is derived from a revelation made to the common parent of mankind.

In order to satisfy this inquiry, he will be naturally led to look a little into the several kinds of religion, to which the various parts of the world may be addicted in his own times. Now, if he does this with ever so little care and candour, it is an affront to common sense, to think him capable

of preferring any other religion to the Christian; or of not perceiving that this religion fully answers all the characters, and is qualified to bring about all the good purposes, he expects from the true religion. If such a man fairly considers the stupid folly, and the gross wickedness, to which all other religions tempt their professors, and in this light compares them with Christianity, he will be forced to give the preference to the latter, in which every thing is done to regulate both the judgment and the will; whereas, in other religions, the first is uninstructed, or misinformed, and the last directly tempted to vice and wickedness. Mahometism makes the gratification of lust to be the reward of piety; and paganism, proposing adulterers, and murderers for gods, actually prescribes the practice of those vices, to which their false divinities were addicted, as acts of worship, whereby their favour is to be obtained, or their displeasure averted. Although my subject requires it, time will not suffer me to wade farther into this sink. Permit me therefore, in order to give this argument that share of its weight, which may suffice for the present purpose, to pass by other religions with this short censure so justly due to them, that I may, in as few words as I can, shew what the benefits, arising from Christianity in this life only, would be, were the judgments of mankind thoroughly possessed with the belief of it, as a divine truth, and their hearts warmly attached to it, as the best rule of action.

It is a weak reflection, and made by very injudicious people, that, although Christianity tends directly to make us happy in a future life, yet the severity of its precepts, and its mortifications, do not promise happiness here, but on the contrary, make a real Christian sad, gloomy, and melancholy.

They say farther, that it hath an ill effect on civil society; inasmuch as it prescribes humility and contempt of the world, to the utter extinction of all that laudable ambition, which prompts a nation to strengthen and extend its power; and lays down such rules of action, under the notion of honesty, as if followed, would ruin all policy, and make it impossible to manage or preserve any political community.

They own, that, in speculation, our religion seems to promise great advantages to the state, but deny that in fact,

its laws can be politically reduced to practice, without great detriment to the community; the management whereof requires, say they, a much greater latitude, than the gospel will allow of. They insist, moreover, that the safety of a nation can be no otherwise secured, than by a perpetual endeavour to enlarge its territories and augment its power; which, without a degree of political avarice and ambition, by no means countenanced by Christianity, is impossible.

Should we grant all this, it would not be a sufficient objection to Christianity; for although all the miseries of this life were to be the portion of a true Christian; and, although, to be such, we should be obliged to renounce all society with mankind, we should have infinite reason to embrace the terms, if the eternal joys of heaven were to be so purchased.

But nothing can be more groundless than the reflection in all its parts; for nothing can be more true, than what our Saviour said, 'Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Godliness itself is great riches,' and brings with it even the wealth of this world. 'For the blessing of the Lord,' says Solomon, 'maketh rich, and he blesseth the habitation of the just. There shall no evil happen to the just. Whatsoever he doth it shall prosper, for God hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant.' Solomon, speaking of the true wisdom, or the true religion, says, 'length of days are in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.'

But, as we are speaking to one who is ignorant, and not yet fully converted to Christianity, let us endeavour to shew him that reason speaks the same thing.

And first, as to particular persons, the most ignorant man may know, that whoever hath, with all his soul and heart, embraced Christianity, must 'deny all his fleshly and worldly lusts;' must be pure from all corruption of nature and habit; must be free from disturbance of unruly passions; must by no means injure another; and must entirely forgive, if he is injured by any; must 'love his neighbour as himself; and love God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his strength.'

Now, although it may cost a man no small struggle to bring himself to such a frame of mind; yet, with the assistance which God will not fail to lend him, it may, and, if it is not his own fault, it must be done; and, when it is done, he is at the height of human happiness. He hath no violent passion within to distract him, no guilt of conscience to wring him. He knows his virtue and happiness, with due vigilance, are for ever secured to him. And from without, nothing can happen to him, that will much afflict him. The world is little in his eyes, and the things of it do not much concern him. All that live near him are happy in his neighbourhood, for he watches for all occasions of doing good. He hath peace with all; he is beloved by all. Were the country he lives in peopled with such men as he, it would be the paradise of the world. 'He is temperate in all things,' and therefore healthful. He is innocent, and therefore cheerful; and, having health and cheerfulness, he bids fair for a long life. In the opinion of the heathen sages, this man must be happy. If, as the Roman satyrist says, 'happiness consists in soundness of mind and body,' he must be happy. If, as Iamblichus says, 'he is happiest who is likest God, simple, pure, and detached from the world,' this must be the happiest of all men. If, as Solon and Antisthenes say, 'they are happy who die well,' this man must be happy. To conclude, his happiness hath that admirable testimony of St. Augustin, who says, 'that is not true happiness, which will not be eternal. He is happy who hath all he wishes, and who wishes nothing but what is fit and good for him. O that God would give us the mind and condition of this man, and leave crowns and sceptres to those that can seize them!'

As the precepts of Christianity, if observed, would thus exalt a man into an angel, so its motives are as powerful, as its doctrines are pure. What are the temptations, of a trifling world, if weighed in the balance of a sound judgment, against temporal and eternal glory, which the good Christian is sure to obtain; and against temporal and eternal disgrace, which the wicked man can by no means escape? Who can doubt a moment, whether he should most love God or the world? What is the value, what is the beauty, the dignity, and excellence of the creature, if compared with

those of the Creator? And as to this world, did not God make it? Does he not govern it? Surely then worldly prosperity and promotion can 'come neither from the east nor the west, nor yet from the south, but from God, who putteth down one, and raiseth up another.'

But, lest the Christian motives to a good life should, through the extreme infirmity of human nature, fail of their effect, our religion proposes still higher helps from the grace of God, communicated to all true believers, through his word and ordinances. The arm of the Almighty himself is employed in beating down the corruptions, and raising the virtues, of every endeavouring Christian. And, even when this all-conquering ally, to humble the Christian with a sense of his own weakness, suffers him to fall, the spirit of God lifts him to a true repentance; and his Redeemer, having atoned for his sin, by his powerful intercessions, raises him again into the comfortable smiles of his master.

Is not the good Christian then the happiest of all men? Place him at the rich man's gate with Lazarus; or place him even on the dunghill of Job, is he not happy? Is he not infinitely happier, than he who is tortured with fear, and other outrageous passions, amidst all the splendors of a palace; than he who welters in guilt on a throne? O lovely! O heavenly Christianity! How blind is he who cannot see thy truth! How depraved and lost, who owns not thy divine excellence! How do the rich and great mistake thee and themselves! They imagine, that with thee they must bid adieu to all the pleasures riches can bestow; and spend their days in gloom and affliction. How grossly in this do they wrong thee? It is true, thou wouldst no longer suffer them to be debased by avarice, to be drenched in luxury, to be polluted with lust, to be racked with pride, ambition, contention, and envy; to rot in foul distempers, or to be broken alive, as on the wheel, with gout and gravel. Thou wouldst not suffer them to live like beasts, and die like devils. And is it for this they are offended?

O you rich whom God hath blessed, perhaps I should rather say, whom you yourselves have cursed with the wealth of this world, do you understand so little of Christianity, as not to know, that, if you were but half as rich in spiritual, as you are in temporal treasures, you might turn your

wealth to infinitely better account, even in point of pleasure than you do? Christianity would allow you so to manage your fortunes, as to dististinguish yourselves according to the rank God hath placed you in: it would allow your houses and dress to be more magnificent, and your tables better covered, than those of meaner men. It only forbids that excess in these things, which always render them a burden and a snare to you, and a bar to all real happiness. And as to so much of your fortunes as these expenses leave you, it would indeed forbid you to lavish them in drunkenness, lewdness, and gaming, but would it not open to you another field of pleasure infinitely more beautiful and extended? Would it not teach you to lay out a share of your wealth for the security and improvement of your country? Would it not teach you to turn the cries of the widow and the orphan, which are now perhaps soliciting heaven for your destruction, into shouts of joy, and prayers for length of days, and prosperity to you and your children? If you are men, surely these things must make your hearts overflow with unutterable joy, and surely, if, to crown your happiness, you spent your leisure hours in improving your minds with useful studies, in tracing the wisdom and goodness of God through the wonders of his works, and by that means, raising your souls, on the wings of contemplation, to divine love, would you have any reason to regret your former amusements with a dice-box, a bottle, or a harlot?

The most ignorant man alive, whether of the great vulgar, or the small, may be convinced, that Christianity, if heartily embraced and followed, must be the happiness of the rich man; who, if he is not a Christian, can draw from all his wealth but an empty shadow of happiness; and of the poor man; who, if he is not a Christian, cannot hope for even that shadow.

If, from considering the blessed effects of Christianity on particulars, we turn our eyes to society, in order to see what it might do there, we shall find the argument in its favour acquiring a much higher degree of strength and clearness. But, in order to do this, we must first understand Christianity and human nature rightly, that we may the better perceive what would be the effect, were the principles and spirit of this holy religion fairly tried on a civil commu-

nity; which hath never yet been done; so, I mean, as to make it not only the private rule of action to those who are governed, but likewise the political rule of action to the governors themselves, in the management of public affairs. Without an experiment of this nature, the objectors can have no better right to impose their conjectures on us, than we have to insist on our own. Nay, that their right in this behalf is by no means so well founded as ours, I hope will soon appear.

Were all the people of any country or community, true and real Christians, in the first place, although all the relations, such as father and son, husband and wife, &c. would be, in reality, reinforced with stronger love, and a more uniform sense of duty; yet would they seem to be so sunk in Christian charity, that the aged would, in effect, be parents to all the young, and the younger people would, in duty and tenderness, be children to all the old; all would be friends and brothers to all. Every one would 'speak truth with his neighbour;' which would beget an entire and universal confidence. They would 'love as brethren;' they would all 'be pitiful; they would all be courteous, in honour prefering one another;' and, as such, must maintain a most delightful intercourse in all their conversations. Pride, wrath, envy, malice, calumny, revenge, would be wholly banished from among them.

Again, as they would all walk before God in uprightness of heart, not only doing justice, but shewing mercy, frauds, contentions, law-suits, and oppressions, would never once be heard of in such a society. All their dealings would be short, easy, and safe. It is no difficult matter to conceive what effects this would have on commerce.

To finish the character of this Christian society, the magistrates would in all things make the laws and justice the rule of government; and would have but little trouble in the discharge of their duty, because the people would be willingly obedient, and strictly honest.

Let us now see what advantages such a society as this would have over all others, both in peace and war.

In the first place, they would never give occasion for a war; because, being lovers of peace, and strict observers of justice, they could never be the aggressors; so that they

must have a better chance for peace, than any other community. Now, it is plain, that, in time of peace, the wealth of the world must flow in upon them. If a people so honest, temperate, and frugal, should turn themselves to commerce, it is evident their country must soon become the centre of trade to all other nations; because with these, and with no others, it will be always safe to deal, and, I should add, profitable too; for they will never desire more, than their reasonable share of gain on any branch of trade.

Their high character of integrity being once universally established, the wealthy people of other countries will never think their money safe, till it is lodged in this; which will make this the guardian of all the superfluous wealth belonging to foreigners, and give it, by that means, such an interest in other countries as will bid fair to secure its peace with them at all events. By means of this wealth, which will answer the pledge given by other nations for their observation of all treaties with this; as also by means of the power and justice, for which this people will be celebrated over the whole world, they will become the arbitrators of all disputes among the neighbouring kingdoms. Their decisions will, of course, acquire the authority of laws; insomuch that, to all the good ends and purposes of power, they will, without the least assistance of modern politics, and without shedding a drop of blood, reign over the world, as far as they are known.

Another, and still better article of wealth, will, in time, be gained by this happy society. Their temperance and industry will give them health, strength, and length of days; which, it is known, must, in the succession of a few ages, prodigiously increase their numbers. Besides, the happiness they enjoy must be an irresistible invitation to foreigners of like dispositions to come over and be naturalized. The good and honest members of other communities, grieved and tired out with the wickedness of their own countries, will come over to this, where they can be so happy; and, while they add prodigiously to its strength, will wholly enfeeble the communities they deserted; because a community, made up of wicked people only, is a mere rope of sand, and cannot long maintain itself. How far this will contribute to cast the balance in favour of the

Christian society, is easy to see. It is also as easy to see, that the unjust and lawless will never once think of settling in a country, where they know the laws will be so impartially and so expeditiously put in execution against them.

On the other hand, the advantages such a society will have, in time of war with its neighbours (observe it can never be in danger of a civil war), will be inconceivably great. I need not say that the members of this community, in which they are so happy, will be warmed with the most ardent love for their country, nor that, in consequence of this love, they will do their utmost to defend it. But it will be of use to observe, that they must be as able, as they are willing, to maintain its cause against all invaders. In the first place, as they will have the zeal of patriots, so they will have the courage of heroes, nay, of what is more, of martyrs, in so just and glorious a cause; while they will have to do with wretches, less than women, who are made cowards by their consciences. These wicked mortals 'will flee when no man pursueth,' while 'those righteous men will be as bold as so many lions.'

In the next place our Christian warriors, being all their lives used to temperance and industry, will look on the hardships and fatigues of war as an amusement; while their enemies softened by luxury, or broken by vice, will be rendered unfit for service in the first month of a campaign. All the rules of discipline, and all the orders of their commander, will be strictly observed by the former; while the latter will be perfectly ungovernable and mutinous. The former will have wealth, the sinew of war; while the latter will have nothing to support so great expences, but what so cowardly and feeble a race of wretches can get by robbery and plunder from the bravest of mankind. And to insure the victory, the God of battles will be the ally of those, and the adversary of these.

By this time I hope the most ignorant person, who hears me, is fully convinced, that Christianity, if heartily embraced, and strictly followed, would make every individual man, and every community of men, happy here, as well as hereafter. And I hope in this conviction he sees, simple and unlearned as he is, a clear demonstration of the truth and excellence of our religion; which, when it is attentively

considered, will 'preach the gospel to the poor,' in a voice as distinct, and with arguments as strong, as the greatest scholar can draw from all his skill in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and antiquity.

What hath a poor ignorant man to do, but, as far as in him lies, to banish his prejudices, to silence his passions; and, in this frame of mind, calling all his reason to his assistance, to consider, that, as God is infinitely gracious, he must will the happiness of all his creatures; that pure Christianity, as it is plainly set forth in Scripture, is not so much the best, as the only religion in the world, that can make him good and happy; and that, if this is not the true religion, infinite as God is in goodness, and impossible as it is for us to be good and happy without the true religion, he hath never been the author of any religion; from whence it will follow, that our gracious Maker hath left us his creatures, unavoidably exposed to sin and misery. If the ignorant man duly weighs the arguments I have offered, with that sense and understanding he shews in matters of less moment, but of more difficulty, he will be fully convinced of this, that Christianity is the will, and his Bible the voice, of God. After having thus settled his mind, he will 'stand fast in the faith;' while others, more conceitedly learned, stagger and wander in endless doubts; he will wisely practise every Christian virtue; while others, who make a bad use, and a vain shew, of higher knowledge, do nothing but dispute and wrangle; he will, in a word, at the great day, when we shall all be tried and sifted by infinite wisdom, be found solid and wholesome wheat, while they shall be thrown aside as empty chaff.

I ought not to dismiss this subject, without observing, that none but the poor ever had, or possibly can have, the gospel effectually preached to them; but I mean by the poor, those whom our Saviour elsewhere calls 'the poor in spirit.' As Christ himself was not born in a palace, but a stable; nor laid in a sumptuous cradle, but in a manger; so his religion never finds its effectual birth in a mind proud and conceitedly refined, but only in a heart, simple, humble, and mortified with a sense of its own insufficiency. Hence it is, that St. Paul cries out, 'where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not

God made foolish the wisdom of this world? The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God stronger than men;' and therefore 'we see,' as he says, 'how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.' On the contrary, we see, God hath singled out the ignorant for apostles and instructors to the learned; 'hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; the base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence; but that, according as it is written, he that glorieth should glory in the Lord.' That God first manifested the true wisdom to the ignorant, and sent them to be the teachers of the knowing, was the effect indeed of his own free choice. But he hath assigned us a reason for this choice, namely, 'that no flesh might glory,' and that all men might acknowledge the true religion to be the work, not of human, but of Divine Wisdom We may guess at another reason for this. The ignorant are more susceptible of true and useful knowledge, than such as are prejudiced to false philosophy, and vain refinements; as they, who have been for some time in the dark, are more readily struck with a true and steady light, than such as are dazzled with false lights. It is still, as it was at first, easier to give light to them that sit in darkness, and are sensible of their own ignorance, than to those who are already too wise to be taught. The truth enters an empty understanding, with greater freedom and facility, than one filled and pre-occupied with its own opinions. This advantage, on the side of the simple and illiterate, is so great, especially in regard to the admission of religious truth, wherein subtilty and refinement have no right to a place, that it were really better for a man to know nothing, in order to 'know Christ crucified,' than to have his head stuffed with the whole circle of human sciences; infinitely better, surely, than to be previously attached to any other system of religion. In this case learning is not half the advantage to the knowing, that a consciousness of their own ignorance is to the illiterate.

Let us now earnestly beseech the good God to give us

the unfeigned simplicity and humility of Christ, that our hearts may be open to the true wisdom of his gospel, and that we may be among those happy poor, to whom it is preached in its full beauty and power. Grant us this, blessed Lord, we most humbly beseech thee, for the sake of Christ Jesus our Saviour; to whom, with Thee, and the Holy Spirit, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now, and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XLIV.

CHRISTIANITY NOT INCREDIBLE BECAUSE MYSTERIOUS,

St. John xvii. 25.

O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee.

As, in order to know any particular man, it is not enough to know, that there is a man of such a name or character, but we must also have some intercourse and intimacy with him, and some personal knowledge of him; so merely to know that there is a Being, who made and governs all things, who is infinitely wise, just, powerful, and good, is only to know that there is a God; it is not to know God.

He only knows God, agreeably to the ends and purposes of religion, who compels his low and narrow prejudices to give way, and enlarges his understanding, to make room for a great and exalted idea of the divine Being; who cleanses and opens his heart, that it may, with all possible love and reverence, receive an amiable and awful impression of him; and who, 'setting wide the gates' of his mind, 'that the King of glory may come in,' feels him entering that living temple, and possessing himself of an absolute power of all the faculties of his soul, and all the passions of his heart. When God is truly known, the understanding must be convinced, that his nature is incomprehensible, and his majesty incon-

ceivable; and the heart must be deeply engaged to him, inasmuch as he is the most amiable and excellent of all beings.

It is plain, therefore, that the vicious person and the libertine know not God; for, if they did, they would fear and love him; they would consider him as a being infinitely glorious and incomprehensible, and would be afraid to make free with him, by presumptuous reasonings about him; they would consider him as always present with them, as a sure witness and just judge, and would not suffer their unruly passions to rebel against him.

What we know of God is spiritually discerned, and not in the common way of knowledge, by our senses or experience. The worldly-minded therefore cannot know God; because, while they follow the track of those false opinions and corrupt passions that govern the world, they can never meet with God, whose paths lie another way, and are past finding out to such minds. The way of God is far above, out of their sight; which is turned downward on the ways of the world, and too intent on the affairs of this life, to consider the nature of an visible and incomprehensible being.

But, to the mind that attends to the voice of religion, and is disposed to receive its instruction, so much of the divine nature discovers itself, as is necessary to the purposes of religion, and the happiness of such a mind.

If even the most spiritual mind should pry farther, or attempt a deeper inquiry into the divine nature, it would quickly find, that 'such knowledge is too wonderful for it,' and 'that it could not attain unto it,' no, not with the assistance of revelation itself; which only lets us so far into the knowledge of God, as is requisiste to our own salvation; but affords neither encouragement or satisfaction to vain inquiries into what we are neither concerned in, nor capable of. The knowledge which our religion affords us of God, is the utmost our narrow faculties can contain, when barely proposed, and infinitely more than they can account for by reason, in its highest improvement.

Our libertines, however, cry out for what they call a rational religion. But is nothing rational which reason cannot perfectly account for? Reason and common sense tell us, God is incomprehensible. Can it be common sense,

or reason, then, that leads some men to disbelieve certain points concerning God, which are delivered and proved to us by the best authority, and never yet shewn to imply the least absurdity, merely because they cannot clearly account for them? If this be reason, then reason is far more inconsistent with itself, than any revealed doctrine concerning God can even seem to be.

But it is not to be supposed, that reason, truly such, should engage in so great an inconsistency. These instances of impiety and absurdity proceed rather from pride, and other worldly passions; which the mysteries of our religion would humble, if believed; and the more practical doctrines that are inseparately united to them, would restrain. But, as it would not look decent to cavil at the practical and moral part of our religion, they make their attack on the mysterious; in hopss that, if that should be once brought into discredit, or suspicion, contempt might be thence reflected on what they think the severities of Christianity.

It is to be presumed, that had our religion, like Mahometism, indulged the desires, and favoured the pleasures, of its believers, it had neither at first, nor in succeeding ages, met with so much distaste and opposition from men of loose dispositions; they would, in return, have indulged all its mysteries. We see this experimentally proved to us by popery; among whose professors there are those of as great penetration, and as strongly engaged to worldly interests, and sensual pleasures, as any, who set up to despise religion among us; yet these men will swallow mysteries by the bundle, will wink at manifest impositions, nay, and contentedly divide their fortunes with their clergy. But then for this they have their consciences, which they could not themselves so effectually keep in order, made easy, and all kept quiet within, be their lives ever so corrupt and dissolute. But our religion, not being calculated for this sort of men, and proposing no absurdities to be believed, hath provided no indulgences to purchase either the faith, or outward conformity, of such persons.

It is undoubtedly by their aversion to all religion, that men are led to dispute the mysteries of the true; for those mysteries contain in them nothing hard to be conceived, or shocking to reason. Every one knows what is understood

by the doctrine of the Trinity, and the incarnation of our Saviour. Now it cannot be shewn, that either the one or the other is at all inconsistent with the divine nature; because no man knows, or possibly can know, so much of God, as to make out the least appearance of such an inconsistency.

Yet these are the only mysteries peculiar to Christianity, at which the very delicate faith of our libertines would seem to stumble. They cannot conceive, how even the power of God should unite the nature of man to his own, nor how the unity of the divine nature should admit of a personal distinction, though they acknowledge the nature of God to be utterly incomprehensible.

Unfortunately for these men, there is a profound mystery in deism, and in natural religion, which it is impossible even to clear up, or reconcile to reason, without admitting the doctrines of the personal distinction, and of the incarnation. It is admitted on all hands, by deists as well as others, that God is both infinitely just, and infinitely merciful. Now, as he is infinitely just, reason tells us he will punish every offender; yet, as he is infinitely merciful, the same reason tells us he will pardon all offences. The light of natural reason can never disengage itself from this great difficulty. Christianity alone can clear it up: for it is impossible for us to conceive any other way of satisfying the justice of God for sin, in order that mercy may take place, but by an atonement; and it is most absurd to suppose, that a sufficient atonement could be made, but by the suffering of a divine person, distinct from him, to whom this atonement ought to be made. Now, a divine person, as such, cannot suffer at all; but a person consisting of the divine and human nature may, and Christians believe he did; and that they 'have remission of sins through his blood.'

All other schemes of religion, but the Christian, set the very attributes of God at eternal variance with each other, and hang a millstone about their own necks; which, as human reason put it on, so it is impossible it should ever take it off. The angels desired to look into this mystery, but were not able to comprehend it, till the wisdom and power of God laid it open in the gospel, and made it intelligible even to men.

This wonderful dispensation, so admirably fitted to satisfy the justice of God, to save the souls of men, to take away the great difficulty that lay on religion, and answer all its excellent ends, is represented by libertines as too mysterious to be conceived, and too inconsistent with reason to be believed. But the truth is, it is too inconsistent with vanity, with sensuality, with avarice, and ambition, to gain admittance among such men. Self-sufficiency, and 'the god of this world, hath blinded the minds of them which believe not; left the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.' It is not reason, but pride and worldly-mindedness, that make all the apostates from Christianity. Some men are so highly conceited of their own abilities as to think they want neither God nor man to instruct them. Their reason is sufficient, and, of itself, gives them a perfect knowledge of all they have occasion to know, even of God himself. How vastly superior are they in the faculties of the mind to the rest of mankind, and, I may add, to the great philosophers of former ages; who have never been able to go much beyond their teachers, in the knowledge of divine things!

But, with all their boasted sufficiency, which was never yet found attended in the same mind with much real wisdom, they know no more of God than other men; nay, so far as they forsake the assistance of revelation, just so far, it is plain, they know less. Socrates, who was the greatest uninspired man that ever lived, said, he knew but one thing, and that was, that he knew nothing. The truth is, the human faculties are too narrow and weak to arrive at a perfect knowledge of any thing in nature; so far are they from being able to afford us a perfect, or, merely by their own strength, any reasonable knowledge of God, the author of nature; between whom and man there is an infinite distance.

Between us and the brute creation there is, in comparison, but a very small and inconsiderable difference; and yet, to a brute, a man is a very incomprehensible being. Nay, what is more, a brute is a composition of unintelligible mysteries to a man; insomuch that he hath been a god to some men, and is a pattern to the libertine, who at once eats and imitates him, desiring to live as he does, without religion, and die without hope.

One man knows but little of another; and, though the wisest of men hath but a small share either of wisdom or power, yet some men have attained to, or struck out, such degrees of knowledge, as must be for ever utterly mysterious and unfathomable to others.

A man knows so little of himself, that he hath reason to cry out, with David, 'I am fearfully and wonderfully made;' he knows not how his thoughts arise within, how his heart beats, how his food nourishes him, how his body grows, how his eye rolls, or his finger moves.

Now, if brutes know so little of us, and even we of ourselves, when the object is so distinct and near, how shall we be able to comprehend the divine nature, which is so infinitely above us? May not this infinite Being be present every-where? And may there not be room in such a boundless nature for mercy and justice, infinite each, in respect to its own proper object? May there not be three persons in the incomprehensible unity of God, for aught we know to the contrary? How can it be proved that there are not? If that proof pretends to come from reason, it is plainly contradicted by another from the same reason, much better known, and more certain; namely, that it is as impossible for us to comprehend the divine nature, as it is for the smallest circle to comprehend the greatest; so that, if reason contradicts itself, it can prove nothing.

But right reason never contradicts itself, nor presumes to pronounce about what is so infinitely above the faculties by which it works. When it seems to do otherwise, it is in minds where the pride and vanity of more knowledge, than comes to the share of others, have transported it beyond, or rather put it beside, itself; so that, being puffed up with their own conceit, they think their capacities of sufficient extent to comprehend him, 'whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain.' Although they know little or nothing of God's works, yet they will presume to dispute and pronounce about God himself, with as much familiarity and assurance, as if they had only an herb or insect under consideration, and are perfectly curious in their observations on him.

But, it is to be presumed, they rather speak of that little fantastic idol they have set up in their own imaginations to

represent him, than of the true God; of whom, if they only had as exalted notions as other wise and good men, they would, like them, keep silence before him; and, instead of attempting so awful a subject, adore him at that infinite distance that nature hath put between him and them. For he who hath the highest knowledge of God, is the most sensible of his own incapacity to comprehend the infinite greatness of the Divine Being; in the contemplation of which, reason, and imagination, and judgment, and all our faculties, are swallowed up and lost.

Simonides, who was a great philosopher and poet, at the request of Hiero, like a modern libertine, immediately undertook to define the Deity; and, as if it had been an easy task, required only a few days to prepare an answer to this question, What is God? but, upon considering the subject a little more at leisure, he found it necessary to demand more time; and the difficulty still increasing with his application, he was obliged to go on doubling his demands of time; till he found the Divine nature incomprehensible, and his own sinking under an utter impossibility of ever accomplishing his rash undertaking.

And so it is, even with those who are assisted by Divine revelation. They can, from thence, learn so much of God's nature, as to know what obligations they lie under to him, and what duties they owe him. But if, through a vain presumption or curiosity, they inquire farther, the subject grows too unsearchable for their penetration, too big for their comprehension. It rises infinitely above their highest thoughts; and their imaginations, on the utmost stretch, and with the most exalted flights, lose sight of it in a moment.

As well might we attempt to fathom the ocean with an inch of line, or encompass the heavens, and infinite space, with a ring that is only large enough for our finger, as think of comprehending the infinite nature with our narrow minds. What measure have we for him, 'who meteth out the heavens?' Or how shall we weigh his nature, 'who putteth the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance, and before whom all the nations of the earth,' and among the rest the mighty libertine, 'are but as the drop of a bucket,' that hangs on the outside, and adds nothing to its weight; and

are 'accounted as the small dust of the balance,' too light to turn the scales! 'With God there is terrible majesty; touching the Almighty we cannot find him out.' How shall we behold him, 'who hath clouds and darknesss round about him, who maketh darkness his secret place, whose pavilion round about him are dark waters, and thick clouds of the sky!' How shall we trace him, 'whose way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and whose footsteps therefore are not known.'

'Canst thou, by searching, find out God?' says Zophar to Job: 'canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? This knowledge is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? It is deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.'

We may put these questions to our libertines, when they presume so to speak of the Divine nature, as if a Trinity of persons were inconsistent with it, and as if they knew so much of God, as to be perfectly sensible of that inconsistency.

But if the libertine is so expert at removing mysteries, let him clear up this, and, in return, I promise to account for the Trinity. How comes it to pass, that a God of infinite justice, wisdom, and power, should suffer that man to live, who makes it the business of his life to corrupt himself, and to debauch the principles and morals of others; who is become the apostle of sin, an enemy to God, and a snare to the souls of men? This, we are all convinced, is consistent with the attributes of God: but can the libertine demonstrate to us that consistency? Can he clear up this great mystery, and give us a satisfactory reason, why himself is not yet overtaken by Divine vengeance?

Pride was the sin of angels; and a vicious thirst of knowledge the first crime of man. Our libertines have united both in themselves, and have met with the double punishment due to those crimes, ignorance, and, it is to be feared, an irretriveable fall from God and happiness. To mortify their pride, they are degraded from a rational to a brutal nature; and, instead of more than common, or indeed possible, knowledge, they are plunged in utter darkness. Their ignorance hinders them from being sensible of their own insufficiency, which would humble them, and so foments their pride; and their pride renders them unteachable, and,

by that means, keeps them in perpetual ignorance. 'They are,' as St. Paul says, 'proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, and perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of truth.'

Thus pride makes proselytes to infidelity, while worldly-mindedness is as active to the same end. By worldly mindedness I do not only mean a love for this world, and the things of it, but also such prejudices, and wrong principles of thinking, as the understanding and heart of men are too apt to contract, in a close conversation with the world.

Those, who are enslaved to the love of this world, the great business of whose lives it is to pursue, and whose chief good it is to enjoy, the riches, the pleasures, the power, and splendor, here below, bear with great impatience the restraints of revealed religion. Our religion bids us renounce and hate the world, and the lusts of the flesh, as enemies to God and our souls. Now is it to be expected that men, who have no other desire but for them, no other pleasure but in them, should digest such a spiritual, such a self-denying religion?

A weak person, who is enslaved to his palate, though labouring under a dangerous disorder, hates the bitter medicine that is necessary to his cure; but when he refuses to take it, he does not say, it is because it is bitter, or that he prefers his palate to his health; but he either insists that he is well enough, and that he is in no need of medicines, or that the medicine is unsound, or the physician who prescribes it unskilful. So it is exactly with the worldly-minded in respect to religion. Although his whole mind is disordered, and torn with outrageous passions, and although nothing else can cure him but religion, yet, as all the passions and appetites vote against it, he cannot away with it. However he is ashamed to give this reason for rejecting it; and therefore either labours to prove himself free from all corruption and irregularity, or to shew that religion hath no truth in it, and is inapplicable to his case. To this end he falls upon mysteries, insisting that his reason forbids him to receive them, and that, if he did, they could be of no use to him, inasmuch as they have no moral tendency to correct the irregularities of human nature.

Hence it comes, that men of this stamp will admit no notion of God into their minds, but such a one as is agree-

able to their prejudices, and represents him as pleased with what pleases themselves. Now the Scriptural notion of God is of quite a different nature, and represents him both as an incomprehensible Being, and as infinitely averse to those corruptions and pollutions they delight in. In order therefore to get rid of it, they set themselves first to expose what they cannot comprehend, that they may afterward, with the better grace, reject what they do not relish in it.

This kind of worldly-mindedness makes more unbelievers indeed, but they are not so sincerely infidel as those, who are led to conceive amiss, and pronounce presumptuously of God, by a wrong bias of thought, contracted in conversing too intimately with the sensible things of this world. They borrow all their rules of thinking from what they observe about them; and when they come to think of God, which is but seldom, they regulate their notions of him by those rules.

From hence it came that a plurality of gods overswarmed the world; for every one conceiving of God, according to his conceptions of things about him, fell at last into the absurdity of worshipping God under the representation of his own favourite man, or river, or brute, or plant.

And, even among persons more enlightened, this is too often the case. In the gloomy mind, God is nothing but wrath and terror, armed with thunder, and intent on vengeance. In a mind amused by gaiety and pleasure, he is all indulgence to the desires and enjoyments of his creatures. The mathematician says he is number, and the musician calls him harmony. These are gods of mens own making, and bear no resemblance to the living and incomprehensible God.

Men are too inclinable to form their notions of God by their notions of human nature; which, nevertheless, they are much in the dark about. Although men are so formed in the image of God, that their faculties bear some resemblance to his attributes, their reason to his wisdom, their probity to his justice, their compassion to his mercy; yet, if they hope by this way to form a perfect notion of God, they will succeed no better than they, who attempted to raise that building to heaven, which they had formed on earth; their endeavours will perish in the same confusion. Now,

if we examine the sentiments of those who deny the Trinity, we shall find them entirely built on this argument of resemblance, over-strained, and wrong applied. In one man there cannot be more persons than one; therefore in God there can only be one person. If a peasant should, in this manner conclude, that, because there is but one apartment in his cottage, there can therefore be no more in the palace of a prince, he would reason just as wisely as they.

There is nothing within us, or about us, that can help us to a perfect knowledge of God. What a notion had the children of Israel of the Divine Being, who, when Moses was conversing with him on mount Sinai, set up a golden calf to represent the Almighty God? Our libertines, in like manner, forsaking the Scriptural notion of him, form one from themselves, which they worship, as the Israelites did theirs, with sensuality and riot; 'they sit down to eat and drink, and then to rise up to play.'

'To whom then shall we liken God, or what likeness shall we compare unto him?' Is he like a plant, or a brute, or the sun, or the host of heaven? What proportion or resemblance can they bear to their Creator? Or is he like a man? 'Shall we imagine, wickedly, that he is even such a one as ourselves?' It is true, the soul of man is formed in the image of the Divine mind, but bears no proportion to that which it resembles. Our likeness of God renders us capable of knowing him, so far as our duty and wants require; while the infinite disproportion between him and us, places him above the curiosity and presumption of our inquiries.

Let us search the Scriptures, and there we shall find enough to dash our own presumption to the ground, to shew us that God is too great to be comprehended by us, to satisfy us that there is a Trinity of persons in his nature; which we may believe, but can never account for. Our enquiry ought not to be, whether the Divine nature is capable of such a Trinity in unity; for this, to mere human reason, is impossible to be determined; but whether the Scriptures are the word of God, or not; and if we find they are, we ought surely to submit our faith to every thing in them, without staying to try it by our wretched rules of thinking.

As to that knowledge of himself which God hath been pleased to vouchsafe us, it is not, in respect to the Trinity,

or any thing else, as the libertines object, either speculative or physical, in any degree; it is purely practical. It was, that we might become good and happy men, that God revealed himself and his will to us. With this gracious intention, he passed the boundaries of nature; and, descending from the heights of heaven, drew back the dark curtain of natural ignorance, that hung between him and us, and shewed us so much of himself as our faculties could bear, and our moral wants required the knowledge of.

Shall we vainly think this visit was made to our curiosity; and instead of adoring and obeying, idly set ourselves to speculating and disputing about him? Yes, the world, which hath been too inquisitive from the beginning, and excessively conceited ever since, will needs convert God, who was proposed solely as an object of love and obedience, into a subject for impertinent and dangerous inquiries. Therefore it was, that our Saviour cried out, in the words of my text, 'O righteous Father! the world hath not known thee.'

He that would know God rightly, let him open the word of God with an humble sense of his own natural ignorance, and his many spiritual wants; with a desire to be instructed, not a design to criticise; and he shall there learn, that God is one infinitely powerful, just, wise, and merciful Being; that, in this infinite Being, there are three Divine persons, to each of whom we lie under distinct and infinite obligations; that the first of these persons framed us out of the dust, and bestowed his own image on us; that the second, after we had corrupted ourselves by sin, took our nature on him, and died to satisfy Divine justice for us, and establish a covenant of peace between God and us; and that the third, knowing we have enemies to contend with, who are too powerful for us, is ever near us, removing from us all unsurmountable impediments to the performance of such articles of the covenant as we are engaged to, on our part. He will likewise find in the holy Scriptures, that this great Being is present every where; 'that he is about us, and within us, and spieth out all our ways;' nay, 'and knows our thoughts long before;' that he will one day call us before his throne, and there, with infinite knowledge and justice, distinguishing the whole race of mankind into two sorts, shall carry with him, to his glorious place of abode, those who resemble

him in truth and goodness; and shall send those with the author of evil, who resemble him in sin and deformity, to regions of darkness, and everlasting despair.

This is that sort of knowledge, which God hath taught us in his word; which we could not have known, without revelation; which 'the world hath not known;' which 'the natural man receiveth not;' and 'to which not many wise men after the flesh, not many noble or mighty, are called;' which, nevertheless, is absolutly necessary to the well-being of society, and the salvation of souls.

This knowledge represents God to us as our Father, our Saviour, our Comforter; as the most compassionate, the most amiable, the most excellent of all beings. Can we behold him, thus gracious and beautiful, and not love him more than the whole world, than life itself, and even being?

This knowledge also displays him to us as an all-knowing witness, as an impartial judge, as an almighty king, who can reward with celestial kingdoms, and punish with infernal fires. Can we behold him in this awful light, and not fear him?

Or can we love and fear him, and yet disobey him? No; the true knowledge of God is the only spring of all duty and virtue, and virtue the only road to true and real happiness.

As to any other sort, or higher degree, of knowledge concerning God, as it would be useless, so would it be impossible and unattainable. Our faculties are not calculated to extend much farther than our wants. If we look impartially and carefully into our nature, we shall find our knowledge so cramped behind us, by the weakness of our memory; cut so short in respect of what is to come, by want of foreknowledge; reduced to so scanty bounds all about us, by the narrowness of our senses, and the shortness of our lives; and so broken, by the infirmity of human reason and judgment, that persons of the most improved capacities seem to direct themselves in the knowledge of even temporal things, through a general darkness, by a faint taper, that enlightens a few paces round them, and moving with them, leaves it dark at a very small distance, both before and behind them.

How unequal must faculties, so deficient in teaching us the nature of things we converse with every day, be, to the

knowledge of an infinite and almighty object, so far removed from our observation! Since so it hath pleased God to form us, we ought to know, and humbly acknowledge, our own infirmity; and, in the spirit of modesty and lowliness, approach the Divine Being, rather with awe, than curiosity; confessing our own weakness, not talking presumptuously of his perfection.

He knows God best, who feels the deepest impressions of his majesty and goodness on his heart; who praises his works indeed aloud, but adores the author in silence and astonishment; whose notions of God are too great for utterance, too wonderful for words to represent; who dares not approach too near to pry into the nature of so awful and terrible a Being; who dares not stand before him, but removes out of the way of him, 'who hath his way in the whirlwind, and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet;' who worships at a respectful distance from 'the fire that devours before him, and the tempest that is stirred up round about him.

To whom, in the unity of the Farther, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, and glory, and worship, for ever. Amen.

DISCOURSE XLV.

HE ONLY SAVES WHO WISELY GIVES AWAY.

Acts xx. 35.

It is more blessed to give, than to receive.

If we consider, that the word blessed, in this saying of our Saviour, signifies the same as happy, we shall conclude the saying itself must appear a perfect paradox to the world. What, will the generality of mankind say, is he more happy who gives away his substance to others, than he who receives from them? How can this be true, if the necessaries and comforts of life are not reckoned in the number of evil things? If they are good, surely it cannot be an happiness

to part with them, nor less than a means of happiness to receive them.

Thus reasons the understanding, prejudiced by a selfish and narrow heart, which ranks all, that avarice or luxury can grasp at, among the necessaries and comforts of life; because it cannot be happy, nor even easy, without a treasure to gaze at, or wanton in. What comes to the happiness arising from such a turn of mind, when extravagance, accidents, losses, law-suits, wars, or death, disperses all its riches? The answer to this question will shew, that the happiness of a rational, not to say a religious creature, ought to be founded on somewhat else, than the possession of wealth. It is not self that says, receive and keep. Self only bids me consult my happiness. It is gross ignorance, and bad habits, that persuade me receiving or keeping can make me happy.

But can the giving away make a man happy? I answer, either wealth is no way concerned in our happiness, or, so far as it is, happiness must arise from a judicious manner of parting with it. He is worse than an idiot, who heaps up riches with no other view than to increase and keep them. The man who reasons at all on the subject, desires them only that he may use them. The question is, how they are to be used? I say, they cannot be used at all, unless they are parted with. But some men part with them for one purpose, and some for another. Our Saviour, who knew best how they ought to be expended, extols the wisdom of giving them away. But the world cannot see wherein the happiness of such a disposal consists; and the truth is, our Saviour does not mean we should part with them for nothing, but only that we should traffick with them for better things than this world can exchange for them. It were better indeed for many a man to throw his riches into the sea, than either to keep or abuse them as he does. But our master, who trusts us with any share of his treasures, proposes to us a wiser and more profitable application of them, than this, or even than laying them out on sensual pleasures, or worldly grandeur. This he expresses, by the blessedness or happiness of giving, as superior to that of receiving. The text acknowledges an happiness in the one, as well as in the other, but gives the preference to the first. Let us see what

each consists in, that we may the better apprehend his reasons for a preference, so little likely to be seconded by the world.

As a man may be presented, either with what is barely necessary to his natural wants, or with what the acquired wants of avarice, ambition, or luxurious appetites, may crave; so his happiness must bear proportion to the greatness of those wants, so revealed, and to the degree of relief afforded.

Now, in relieving the distresses of the poor, or such as are naturally in want, the pleasure of comfort of the receiver, being proportioned to the degree of relief, is seldom perfect; because the relief is usually too much stinted to remove his wants intirely. And as he is not at present fully supplied, so he cannot help apprehending the danger of being soon again in as great want as ever. Besides, if 'the borrower is servant to the lender,' the receiver, in this case, must be still more inferior to, and dependent on the giver. If he hath any pride or spirit (and who hath not?) this will give him proportionable uneasiness, which, together with his fears as to future supplies, will considerably lessen the satisfaction he finds in the present. From hence it may appear, that a poor man, thus relieved, is far enough from being in a very blessed or happy condition; although it is some degree of happiness to him, that he feels his present necessity less sensibly than he did.

On the other hand, the unnatural wants, proceeding from a covetous, an ambitious, or a luxurious turn of mind, are always insatiable, and therefore can never be fully relieved. If one plain dish will not satisfy a man, neither will two, nor ten, unless they are of the most sumptuous and delicious kinds. If a coarse coat will not content him, neither will a fine one, unless it is laced. If an estate of fifty pounds a year is not sufficient for him, it is in vain to give him one of a hundred, or a thousand; it is in vain to present him with a lordship, or a kingdom. The whole world would be too little to make him happy. It is found, by universal experience, that, in all men of this kind, every additional gratification is but an incentive to new and greater desires. All the happiness then, of such a receiver, consists in a short fit of pleasure, immediately devoured by wants, ten times greater than the former.

The happiness of the giver must be very moderate indeed, not to outweigh that of the receiver in either of these instances. But what his happiness is we shall now proceed to shew, by opening those better treasures, which our Saviour invites him to purchase with the superfluities of his worldly wealth.

To make a man a giver, in our Saviour's meaning, he must have a lively sense of humanity and religion. Without either or both of these, he is not likely to be a considerable giver, at least to the poor; to the relief of whom I shall confine myself in what I intend to say farther on this subject.

Of all men in this world, there is none who bids so fair for happiness here, as he who is blessed both with wealth and true humanity. But when I said blessed with wealth, I needed not to have added, with humanity; because wealth without it is a curse of the severest kind. Every man enjoys his riches according to his sense of those satisfactions, that may be purchased with them. The man of pleasure lays out his wealth on wine and women; but shame, guilt, and diseases, prove him in the end a losing purchaser. The man of grandeur lays out his on figure; but finds in the conclusion, he hath been all his life only treating the mob of gapers, at an immense expence, with a vain and senseless pageant. The covetous lays out his to bring in more; but finds, when he is a dying, that he never had any; that he was always a beggar; and that wise and selfish as he thought himself, he nevertheless spent his miserable days in labouring for another, who hovers over him in his last moments with no other sentiments those of a hungry vulture, watching for the carcase of a dying beast.

The man of humanity plans his happiness on a nobler principle, which can neither deceive him in the progress, nor disappoint him in the end; a principle, which, continually exerted, gives him an high, an exquisite, and continual delight, and, at the last, entertains his departing soul with reflections as sweet as the music of angels.

This man, not content with doing justice in his dealings, to the rest of mankind, considers them, through a more elevated sense than that of honesty, as connected with him by the tender ties of one common nature. They 'are bone

of his bone, and flesh of his flesh,' and therefore he feels what they feel, almost as sensibly, and much more delicately, than he does that which immediately affects his own body. With such sentiments, we are not to wonder at his doing all a kind heart can do, to prevent the distresses of all who live under him; nor, hard as our own hearts may be, are we to be surprised, when we see him administering speedy and plentiful relief, so far as his fortune enables him, to the wants of all within his knowledge. The man is in pain till he does it; and in raptures when it is done; and why? but because the poor man and he are fellow-creatures, are both of the same species, and he owns it, he owns it in his fellow feeling; while the narrow-hearted miser, and the proud oppressor, confess it in words, which cost them nothing, but deny it in every action of their lives.

But does not his sense of humanity, which lays his heart open to so many scenes of affliction, make him miserable? No: the good God, who formed this beneficent heart by the lovely model of his own, while he blessed him with such a heart, blessed him at the same time with the power of turning his tenderness into an happy inlet for joys like those of his Maker, when infinite mercy and pity shower relief on the miserable.

If, however, the numbness of your own heart will not suffer you, at a speculative distance, to conceive the happiness this man tastes in relieving the poor, be present with him (in case you do not care to make the experiment on yourself) when he goes to the house of his poor neighbour with the means of relief in his hands, and you will then see, whether it is folly in him to lay out what he can spare on his singular sort of pleasure. You see him going to the gloomy abode, where want and misery have taken up their residence, to prevent the application, and relieve the anxiety, of his afflicted neighbour, before he hath time to blush for the nakedness of his family; you see him supplying the present necessities of the family; and, if the head of it is an honest man, comforting him with the hope of farther help, giving courage to his dejected heart, and promising to befriend him in all his difficulties for the future. Then you see the poor man raising his drooping head, and, with eyes and hands lifted to heaven, you hear him beseeching God to

pour his richest blessings on his deliverer. Grief, fear, despair, present themselves as the good man enters; but, as if he were the angel of God, he leaves in their place, when he goes out, hope, comfort, and joy. Tell me, for I speak to to thine heart, if thou hast a heart of flesh, do you not think this a happy man? Do you understand that dew on his cheek? Can you enter into the spirit from whence it springs? Do you think his tears proceed from sorrow, or from a conscious tenderness, which makes him partaker in the relief of his neighbour? Is it in the power of music, think you, to salute your ears with a sound so ravishing, as the prayers of his poor neighbour are to his? Could the splendor of a throne, or of the highest earthly magnificence, all your own, greet your eyes with a sight so pleasing, so glorious, as the change wrought by charity in the heart and countenance of his fellow-creature, appears in the eyes of this friend to mankind? Can a French cook dress up such a morsel as this? Can the wines of Greece or Hungary give such a transport to the spirits? Can beauty, fallacious beauty! afford a pleasure, so high, so pure, so lasting as this? I hope you are a human creature, and do not think they can. No: this instance will be found to verify the words of our Saviour. The receiver, who, with all his family, were saved from perishing for want of bread, is not so blessed, is not so happy, as the giver, who brought the seasonable means of relief. The joy of the receiver was not higher in its first transport, than that of the giver. The joy of the receiver was but for a time, and cannot go with him beyond the grave; but the joy of the giver will accompany him through every period of life, will sooth his soul in the pangs of death, and set an additional jewel in his eternal crown.

Did the wealthy, instead of bestowing their alms in churches, and at a distance from the objects to be relieved, make it their business personally to visit the prisons, and the wretched cottages of the poor, to view the miserable beds they languish life away on, to examine the scanty quantity, and the disagreeable or unwholesome qualities of the food wherewith they endeavour to protract an unhappy life, there would be no need of dunning discourses like this; their charity would flow in more unstinted streams of relief

to their fellow-creatures, and of joy to themselves, that can be hoped for, while the distresses of the poor are as remote from their knowledge, as their riot and luxury are from that of the poor.

Men seek for satisfaction and honour by their expenses; but foolishly calculate them for the gratification of low appetites and inordinate affections, that crave the more, the more they are indulged, and never afford a pure, a solid, or lasting pleasure. Their fortunes are swallowed up and lost in these; while in the mean time they scarcely so much as know, that they have others of a higher and better turn, which, if suffered to operate, would ennoble their nature with the dignity, and bless their lives with the happiness of angels.

Is it not a shame, a reproach to the understanding of a rational creature, to see a great sum glittering idly in a jewel, or sunk in an expensive suit of clothes, which, if unfolded by charity, might be sufficient to protect fifty human creatures from the cold of this untoward climate?

Why is the house of this wealthy man, who is not six feet high, large enough to contain a hundred elephants; while so many dwellings round him, are hardly fit for the habitation of swine?

Why is his table covered with costly dishes, and expensive liquors, the provocatives of pride and lust; while hundreds of his poor neighbours pine away with hunger, and look black in the face, for want of bread? Why does he gorge, while they starve? Why is his sickly appetite surfeited with one tasteless meal, before another is half digested, while his sense of humanity is mortified with a perpetual fast? O shameful self-denial, fit only for him, who worships the enemy of human happiness! The narrow heart hath a narrow sphere of enjoyment, and gathers all it can about itself, as if it could enjoy whatsoever it hinders others from enjoying. It bids mankind stand at a distance, while it vainly courts its fine clothes, or its great house, or its sumptuous table for pleasures that are either only imaginary, or brutal.

But the heart, that is opened and enlarged by humanity, hath an infinitely wider scope of enjoyment. Having laid out on itself what is sufficient for a comfortable subsistence,

it does not suffer the superfluity to loiter idly near itself, but generously disperses it among such as are in need, and so enjoys it in all the poor families of the neighbourhood. A man with such a heart feels double the satisfaction from this enjoyment at rebound, that he does in what is expended immediately on himself; for that which he swallows himself, only gratifies his palate; whereas that wherewith he feeds the poor, touches him through a more refined and exalted sense, transports his heart, and gives a rapture to his very soul. He tastes with the palate of the hungry, and feeds through a thousand appetites. His whole life is a feast of love, in which there is hardly a day, wherein he does not feel, by some sweet experiment, that 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.'

When we express our amazement at the too general unwillingness in people of fortune to relieve the distresses of the poor, what we wonder at, as unnnatural, is vulgarly acacounted for, by saying self-interest is stronger than charity, and prevails on the wealthy to be kind to themselves, rather than others. But this can never lessen the surprise of the good natured, whose bowels of compassion tell him, self can no way be so sweetly gratified, nor so sensibly consulted, as by acts of charity.

The pleasure however of giving, like men, is not the only self-interest we have in supplying the necessities of the poor; we have another, as Christians, of infinately more importance to us, founded on the power annexed to acts of charity in promoting our eternal welfare.

By the laws of men, the wealth we are possessed of is so intirely our own, that we may dispose of it as we please. But we are nevertheless accountable to God, the giver, for the disbursement of all we have. If the 'Lord giveth us wealth,' or, which is the same thing, 'the power to get wealth,' we cannot rationally suppose, a God of infinite wisdom intended so much for one back, or belly, no larger than those of other men. Neither can we suppose, a being so infinitely good, could have designed to gratify the pride or gluttony of any man, by putting a fortune into his hands, so much too large for all his natural and reasonable demands. As these things cannot be supposed, it follows, that the bulk of a rich man's possessions was intended for the support of

others, not sufficiently provided for by the ordinary dispensations of Providence.

The rich man, being therefore the trustee, the treasurer, and the almoner, of Providence, must give an account of his charge to the great proprietor. It concerns his conscience, as a steward, to be trusty in the disbursement of his master's treasures. If he wraps the talent, committed to him, in a napkin; or, what is worse, if he trades on it, in riot and vice, for the enemy of God; he may expect to hear of it in the sentence pronounced on him by that judge, whose goodness, as well as justice, makes him an austere master in regard to the management of what was intended for the relief of his poor. But, in case he shall be found to have dealt faithfully in his trust, and dispersed judiciously and liberally abroad, he may expect a greater treasure, reserved to honour his fidelity, and reward his services, in a better world; and may expect to hear his sentence in these blessed words, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' Considered in this light, the rich man cannot be honest, without being charitable.

However, although in strictness he is only the trustee of Providence, yet his master, not content to honour him with so great a trust, gives him a kind of property in the wealth committed to his charge, bestowing the spiritual produce of all the good he does with it, on himself, and reckoning whatsoever he lays out on the relief of the poor, as lent out of his own proper possessions. And, lest the rich man should doubt the security of the poor, God himself becomes bail for the repayment, by an express bond. 'He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and look whatsoever he layeth out, it shall be paid him again.' What an ungrateful infidel is he, who will not venture all he can spare on such a security! If they, who have more than their own reasonable wants require, will not give to man, let them at least lend to God. The security is so certain, and the interest so very high, that they must be miserably wanting to themselves, if they do not advance all they can upon it.

But although it is enough for us to be told in general, that God will repay all our charities; yet as this glorious debtor hath, in his word, given us some intimation of the

manner in which he purposes to clear accounts with us, it is worth our while to hear it; because, perhaps we should be less inclinable to lend, if the coin, and time, in which we are to be paid, were not particularly specified to us.

In the first place, almsgiving brings a blessing on every thing we enjoy, and cleanses it for our use. 'Give alms of such things as you have, and behold all things are clean unto you.' In the next place, it will procure for us divine assistance and comfort, in time of sickness and trouble. 'Blessed is the man that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in the time of trouble. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.' In the third place, it obtains for us the pardon of our sins. 'By mercy and truth iniquity is purged. Break off thy sins by righteousness,' saith Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar, 'and thy iniquities, by shewing mercy to the poor.' In the fourth place, it is imputed to us for righteousness. He, saith David, speaking of the charitable man, 'hath dispersed abroad, he hath given to the poor; and his righteousness remaineth for ever.' In the fifth place, God promises lustre to the character, health to the body, fatness to the bones, direction to the ways, and success to the prayers of him who is compassionate to the poor. 'Is not this the fast that I have chosen? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh. Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy health shall spring forth speedily. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer.—If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise in obscurity; the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.' In the last place, an heavenly treasure is promised to the friend of the poor. 'If thou wilt be perfect,' saith Christ 'sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.' Let not that man, from whom these glorious promises can extort nothing for the poor, dare to say, he believes, or is a Christian.

God presses the duty of almsgiving on us in a yet closer and tenderer manner. He represents man as formed after his own image, and calls us his children. Nay, Christ hath connected us to himself, and made us members of that mystical body of which he is the head, and for which he was content his natural body should be crucified. Let us remember now, that the poor man is God's image, and a limb of Christ; and then ask ourselves, how we can bear to see this representative of God, this part of our Redeemer's body, through which he feels so sensibly, pining for want of those necessaries, which a small retrenchment from our idle expenses, or a few pieces from that hoard of wealth we even mean not to use, could procure. As if the pity of the poor, and the love of God, were the same thing, he says to us, 'Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?' Let us not say, we love our poor brother, if we shew no compassion for him in his distress. You are to be judged by your actions, not your professions. 'If a brother or sister be naked, or destitute of daily food; and one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things that be needful to the body; what doth it profit?' Or what other purpose doth it serve than to shew your contempt of your fellow-creature, and to insult the majesty of his maker? Neither let us say, we love God, since we will do nothing for his sake. It is an impudent lie, to say, we 'love God, whom we have not seen,' if we shew no love, no pity, to our poor distressed neighbours, whom we see every day, struggling, some with old age, others with numerous families, others with sickness, others in confinement, others under oppression, and all in want of the common necessaries of life. He gives an ill account of his piety, who is hard-hearted and close-handed to the poor; for Christ makes no difference in this respect between himself and the indigent. 'I,' that is, the distressed and miserable, 'was hungry, and you fed me not; was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; was naked, and you clothed me not; was sick and in prison, and you neither visited nor comforted me.' It will be in vain to say, 'we never saw thee in this condition;' for Christ hath said al-

ready, and will say it again, when it must be minded, 'if you do it not to one of these little ones, you do it not to me.' He, whose heart is shut against the poor, may assure himself, the ears of God are shut against all his applications. How can his prayers solicit for prosperity, who confines all he gets to his own use, and surfeits on that surplus of God's bounty, which ought to be imparted to the poor? How can he thank God for his wealth, who renders that wealth a curse to himself, by an unfaithful management of it, in respect to God the proprietor; and a cruel detention of it from the necessitous, for whose relief it was put into his hands? How can he sue for mercy from God, when calamity, when fear, when death, comes upon him, and drives the sting of guilt through his conscience, into his soul, who is deaf to the distressful cries of his own flesh and blood, of God's image, of Christ's member imploring relief from miseries, too affecting for a feeling heart to bear the very sight of in another? Nothing can be more evident, than that a want of pity for the poor, cuts off all religious communication between God and the hard-heated. He is indeed, too unlike the fountain of all goodness and pity, to leave room for any connexion with him; insomuch that, it is to be feared, the very mercy of God, which opens a door of pardon to other sinners, will shut it against this, in whom the best, the most lovely resemblance of man to God, is totally defaced. How can infinite pity shew itself to a heart that hath no pity, that is so opposite to itself? No: even mercy will plead against him, and give him less indulgence than justice itself.

There is one hindrance to the kind of charity I have been speaking of, which I cannot pass over unnoticed on this occasion. Many persons, otherwise well-affected to the poor, find their hearts cooled, and shut against real objects of compassion, by the gross abuse of their goodness, often shewn to idlers and thieves, who put on the appearance of distress. This unhappy turn of mind proceeds, in a great measure, from want of due circumspection; for, did the rich, who are disposed to almsgiving, take care to distinguish the pretended from the real object of charity, they would hardly ever make a wrong application of their alms. The distresses of their poor neighbours, which might be easily

examined into, ought, for the most part, to engross their pity, and leave little for such vagrants, as exercise a motley trade, made up of begging, pilfering, and sharping.

But there is little or no room for this abuse of charity, in its application to such almshouses, and public contributions for the education or support of the poor, as have been well considered, and are faithfully managed. Again, of all these contributions, none seems to bid so fair for doing good, as that which is intended for feeding, clothing and instructing poor children; because in the first place, there can be no mistake about their wants, nor doubts of their innocence; and, in the next, whatsoever is given for this use is expended on a manageable kind of poor, whom the donor at once relieves, and renders deserving of relief. Other charities but in part remove a calamity, after it hath been severely felt for some time; this prevents it, by enabling the object to support himself. Other alms bring assistance only to the body; this to both body and soul. Other alms supply a temporal necessity; this, as far as human means can contribute to so great an end, provides for eternal happiness. Other alms are generally given to persons, already rendered useless to mankind, who have little left about them that concerns society, but a mouth and stomach; this bestows on the community a number of useful hands, which otherwise might have been idle, or employed in doing mischief. Other alms are often expended on such as we can only pity, because reduced to poverty by sloth, extravagance, or wickedness; this on innocent creatures, whom we ought to pity, because, in themselves, they are altogether helpless; and, for whom, we ought to feel the greatest tenderness, because God and nature have rendered them exceeding lovely in our eyes, for that very purpose.

Consider you, whom the present charitable occasion hath assembled, what it is you are called upon to do. It is to take a number of yet innocent young creatures out of the hands of natural corruption, of vile company, of temptations to idleness, lying, debauchery, drunkenness, theft, robbery; to turn them from a course that tends, through vice and infamy, to the gallows and damnation, and to lead them, as it were, by the hand, through a regular course of education and good principles, to such a scheme of life, as

is most likely to be useful and happy here, and to end in eternal peace with God. Consider this, and you will want no other motive to contribute to the present charity.

I choose to touch but briefly on these considerations, important as they are, knowing that the tender and generous minds of those who hear me, are this moment pleading the same cause, with the eloquence of the heart, which is stronger than that of words. It is almost needless to remind an assembly, collected, as this is, out of a people already distinguished for their compassion to the poor, that the gracious Father of us all will doubly bless those in their own children, whose compassion extends itself to the children of their poor neighbours; or that a man can hardly do any thing more acceptable in the sight of Christ, than to cherish in his charitable arms, as he did, those engaging objects, so full of amiable innocence and sweet simplicity, that we need nothing more, in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven, than to resemble them.

Should I take up more of your time in endeavouring to soften your hearts into a tenderness for human nature, in its most lovely, but most helpless, circumstances; I should but wrong you, who had never come hither, on this occasion, had not your hearts been previously affected with that very tenderness, from generous sensations, and beneficent motives of their own. Give way to this noble turn of mind; let your hands be as open as your hearts, that God, who is looking on, may see your pity; and the poor, who look up to you for relief, may taste the fruits of your compassion, and add their prayers to yours for every divine blessing on you, and all you love or possess.

The cry of the poor, that ascends daily before God, and draws his peculiar attention, returns in blessings on the liberal hand, and in judgments on the hard heart. Whosoever 'would choose blessing, rather than cursing, let him not turn his face from the poor man, and then the face of the Lord shall not be turned away from him,' when he becomes poor himself and destitute of righteousness to recommend him, shall beg and sue for mercy at the hour of death, and in the day of judgment. 'Let him provide for the sick and needy, that the Lord may preserve him alive, and bless him upon the earth. Let him deliver the poor that cries, and

the fatherless, and him that hath none to help him; let him be eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, and a father to the poor; the cause that he knows not, let him search it out; let him break the jaws of the wicked, and pluck the spoil out of his teeth, that the blessing of him who was ready to perish may come upon him, and that the widow's heart may sing for joy.' Let him resolutely plead the cause of the helpless, and without hire; and generously stand between him and his persecutors of all kinds, cold, hunger, and oppression; and, for his reward, he shall not want an advocate to plead an infinitely more important cause for him, against his own sins, and the accusations of his enemy.

Shall one man cry out in anguish and misery, and another not feel? Shall one neighbour see another sinking under affliction, and not stretch out his hand to support him? Shall one shiver with cold, and there be none to clothe him? Shall another pine away with hunger, and there be none to feed him, of all those whose fortunes enable them to flaunt in finery, and surfeit in luxury? Shall the poor call out for help, and humanity refuse it? Shall God sue for a share of his own, and religion give him a denial? Shall heaven be set to sale for a mite, and there be none found to purchase?

These things shall not, cannot be, if there are the least remains of compassion towards men, or love towards God, or sense of our greatest interest, left among us. If the rich, who never felt the extremities of cold or hunger, could conceive what they are, and suppose themselves in the places of the poor, they would be more ready to conform themselves to the royal law, and 'to do as they would be done by.' But, though they have never been in this sort of distress, have they not eyes? Can they not see the houses of the poor, open to every injury of the weather; their wretched beds of straw, to which sleep and rest must be strangers; their tattered clothes, hardly sufficient for decency; their scanty meal of tasteless and unwholsome trash; their faces pale, and worn to the bone, for want of bread; their languid eyes, sunk deep into their heads, and dimmed, as it were, with the shadows of death? Can they not hear the cries of their starving children, re-echoed, in a melan-

choly concert, by the groans of parents, enfeebled, to an impossibility of affording help, by want of nourishment, or by distempers, perhaps by both? If they can see and hear these things, have they not bowels to tell them, this is misery? Or have they neither bowels nor conscience, to rouse them to the relief of this misery, suffered by their poor fellow-creature, the creature of that God who gave them all their wealth?

I know the good-natured heart that hears me, not only pardons the pains I take on this most affecting subject, but melts at every touch of a discourse like this, and wishes for one of more power in speaking, who could force a passage to hearts less sensible and tender. I will not apologize for what I have said to the man of humanity, because his goodness supersedes the necessity of recommending the poor to his compassion. And as for the hard and the insensible, for whom, I own, this discourse was intended, he will hear my apology, and know my reasons for thus speaking, when his poor brother and he meet before the throne of God.

In the mean time, let us beseech the good God to 'take from us the heart of stone,' and to 'give us one of flesh,' that may feel the distresses of our fellow-creatures, for the sake of Christ Jesus our Redeemer; to whom, with God the Father of the poor, and God the guardian and comforter of the afflicted, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now, and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XLVI.

THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF FAITH.

ROM. I. 17.

Therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.

THE light of the natural day is so ordered by Providence as not to fall on the eye, all at once, in its full lustre, but rises and increases by insensible degrees, lest that organ of sight should either be forced to shut itself up in voluntary darkness, or be exposed to the danger of losing its power of vision. In like manner, he who is stiled the East, the Light, and Righteousness, breaks not forth on us, at first in all his brightness, but discovers himself, 'here a little, and there a little,' and so, 'shineth more and more unto the perfect day' of that evangelical knowledge, which lays open too deep and too glorious a mystery of wisdom, power, and love, to be endured by the human mind, were it not gradually dispensed. Reason, weak reason, must have fled from, or been lost in, a light so over-powering, had it burst at the first moment in its full noon of brightness, on that naturally benighted and enfeebled faculty. From the beginning, therefore, it did but dawn on the world through an obscure, but consolatory prophecy; shone somewhat more clearly through the promise made to Abraham; emitted a still more distinguishable and steady ray through the typical institutions, and vicarious sacrifices of the Mosaical law; became more characteristical in the prophecies of David, Isaiah, and others; marked out the time of its own meridian in those of Daniel; grew more diffusive, in the repeated captivities of the Jews; and being preceded by its 'morning star' the Baptist, had its 'day-spring' in the birth, and arose to its full height in the miracles, preachings, sufferings, and resurrection of Christ. Even in this fullest display of itself, a singular simplicity and plainness of dress, allaying its heat, and veiling its brightness, presents it to the mind through a Chili sky, so tempered as neither to scorch nor glare.

Thus was the gospel intoduced; and thus in that gospel, was the 'righteousness of God revealed in Christ,' whereby not only the rectitude, but the mercy also, of his dealings with men, is fully justified to us, and we to him. Here we see, how from the lowest degree of faith, excited by the least striking lights or proofs, a yet higher and stronger is produced, as the lights advance in number and force.

Parallel to this progress of faith among mankind in general, is another, made in the breast of every individual Christian, who first believes in the gospel history, as he does in any other, on the strength of the testimony afforded by its witnesses; then resigning his heart to that which his judgment had pronounced so true, and so replete at the same time with God's infinite goodness to him, he soon finds his rational or human, improved into divine faith by 'the demonstration of the spirit.' He, like the church of God, is trained by dimmer lights to bear the more vivid; and as the eye of his mind is more and more familiarised to the light, that light pours on him in a stronger beam, and opens to his view the incomprehensible wonders of that original righteousness, which interposing between the divine and human nature, justifies God to the reason of man, and man to the mercy of God.

If the faith of a Christian can be vindicated as rational, and well founded in the first step of its progress, and, in the second, as productive of real goodness and solid happiness, wherever it takes place; I hope, it will be amply vindicated at the same time against the cavils of those infidels, who, to run down Christian faith, treat faith in general as a weak credulity, vilify both as not founded on argument, and endeavour to represent the former as rather a vice, if not supported by evidence; at least as no virtue, if countenanced by that which is sufficient.

This good design, together with another, namely, to make faith somewhat more intelligible, than it is at present, among the professors of Christianity, will be attempted in a short series of discourses on that subject, which I intend, with God's permission, to deliver from this place. Whether the one or the other of these designs is of the greater consequence to truth, will not be known, till it is determined, which of the two, our senseless controversies about faith, or

the artful attacks made on it by our common adversaries, have been the more fruitful source of confusion.

Faith, as an inlet to, or a branch of knowledge, is well enough defined, and distinguished from the other inlets and branches, by logicians. But to this definition and distinction, our controvertists on the subject of faith seem to pay little or no regard. Yet till knowledge, in its several branches, and in this particularly, is carefully analysed, and closely considered, there will be no end of mistakes. That we may not therefore continue to talk at random on a subject of such infinite moment,

Let us first briefly delineate these branches, as distinct from one another, that we may see their mutual connexions, and find out the comparative dependence which we may safely have on each.

After this, let us lay down such rules for regulating our belief in all cases, as may distinguish, in the clearest manner, the credible from the contrary reports.

The use, nay the absolute necessity of doing both, will evidently appear by applying that delineation, and these rules, to Christian faith in particular.

In the first place then, there are certain luminous truths, which we either receive through our senses, or more inwardly feel the force of, by immediate contact, as it were, with the very faculties of our minds. These truths of both sorts, which I call primary, carry their own evidence with them, and produce full conviction, without the help of borrowed lights or proofs. At the same time that they discover themselves to all capacities by their own native lustre, they also enlighten and prove such other points, not evident in themselves, as are naturally connected with them, and can be brought by the mind within the influence of their light. To give an instance of each; one 'thing I know,' saith he in the gospel, whom Christ cured of his blindness, 'that whereas I was blind, now I see. God heareth not sinners' (the vilest impostors he means), so as to work miracles at their request.

This kind of knowledge, by an expression taken from a particular sensation applied to all our immediate perceptions of truth, whether external or internal, is called intuitive; is in its outward and proper sense enjoyed by man in common

with the whole animal creation; and, in a metaphorical sense, but restrained to perceptions of pure intellect only, ascribed to the Deity himself.

Clear and intuitive however as is our perception of these truths, we nevertheless find by experience, that our senses sometimes deceive us, either through a defect in themselves, or an obscurity and confusion in the objects presented, or a too slight attention of the mind. Nay, we sometimes through a wrong education, or through a bias received from those we have long conversed with, and much venerated, habitually attach ourselves to that, as a first principle, and as self-evinent, which is really false. Thus it is that imperfection and error are found in the very fountain of all our knowledge, and springing from thence, are apt more or less to tincture the stream. But this, which rarely happens, and may in most cases, be easily avoided, or rectified, hinders not the evidence (I mean the self-evidence) mentioned, from furnishing the foundation of all our other knowledge.

On the certainty of this evidence, and by the light of these primary truths, reason is able to work out a proof of other truths, neither clear in themselves, nor evidenced by lights of their own, but transparent nevertheless to the light of first principles. When these, which I call secondary truths, are once proved, and received as such by the understanding, they serve again as axioms for the establishment of new ones, and so on. Kindled at the first, they now emit a light, in effect, their own, applicable to subsequent obscurities, in a chain, consisting sometimes of many links; for example, the man just mentioned, to whom our Saviour had given sight, having a clear conviction of the happy change in himself, and of this truth also, that God heareth not sinners, concludes from thence, in his disputation with the Jews, that Christ was no deceiver, but a good man, and sent from God. It is chiefly, if not wholly, in this second step of knowledge ,that our reasoning faculty is concerned, and shews itself more or less powerful, according to its different degree of natural or acquired ability in different men. In this exertion of the rational faculty, the mind extends its perception of truth beyond the verge of its senses, and even internal apprehensions of first principles, so as to see or know, at a distance from itself.

Here also we are still more apt to be deceived, not only as taking that for an unquestionable and self-evident truth, which in reality is false, and concluding from it as certain; but likewise as reasoning wrong from right principles, through some imperfection in, or a bad use of, the reasoning faculty itself. It is true, our reasoning faculty is as much the work of God, and perhaps as perfect in itself, as our senses, and other powers of perceiving self-evident principles; but in regard to the exercise of this faculty, we are more voluntary, I dare not see, free, than in that of the senses and perceptions mentioned; and therefore, here is more room for error, as here is a greater concurrence of our own. Yet this is the very faculty or power, which extends our knowledge beyond that of brutes, enables us to subdue them, and appropriate all their powers to our own use. It is also this faculty which gives birth to all the arts and sciences, and renders us capable of religion.

But that the human mind may not be confined to these two inlets of knowledge, which would circumscribe our understanding, and with it our sphere of action, within very narrow limits, there is a much larger field opened to us by a third way, which, passing through the primary and secondary truths, puts us into the hands of faith, founded on report, in order to informations of the last consequence to us, whereof our senses, our reason, and our own experience, could never have given us any intelligence, much less any certainty. The notices of this third class being in their own nature wholly dark and opaque to those who can be made acquainted with them only by report, are illuminated and brought into view by the light thrown on that report from self-evident truths, and sound arguments.

Faith now, or belief, is an assent of the rational mind to some report, whether affirmative or negative, on the admitted credit of him or them who make it. On this all commerce, all trials at law, and therefore all government, or society is founded. By this we have the use of sensation at the most distant parts of the world, though we stir not from home. Nay, since the invention of writing, by this we may see what the rest of mankind hear, taste, feel, or smell, over the whole earth, and so become as it were all eye. By this we raise the dead again, and recall to our view the transac-

tions of past ages. By this we may even commence prophets, and foreknow all the events of considerable consequence that shall happen to us, from the present hour, to all eternity. An instance may make me more intelligible. The man born blind, and restored to his sight by our Saviour, having from a full conviction of the fact, and the infinite truth, and goodness of God, proved to himself, that Christ came from God, goes on by both, by all the credit he had with his neighbours, as a man of veracity, by the concurring testimony of his parents, and all who had known him from his infancy, and by the reasonings that had satisfied himself, not only to report the miracle every where, but by that means also to confirm the faith of some, and to bring over others who were yet unbelievers.

But in this third step of our progress towards knowledge by faith or belief, there is more room for error and imposition, than in both the former. The reporters may be deceived themselves, or wilfully mean to deceive others; and either to believe or disbelieve, may be attended with great and equal consequences, whether beneficial or mischievous.

To prevent as far as in us lies, the danger of either, we ought when the matter reported concerns us, in any respect or degree, to examine with proportionable attention, and by all the lights afforded us in primary and secondary principles, whether it is possible or probable in itself; what were the means of knowledge, both as to capacity and opportunity, in the reporter; whether he is to our own knowledge, or so vouched by others, in whom we may safely confide, a person of tried integrity; whether he apparently hath, or possibly may have, an interest in our belief of his report; whether he is able and willing to lay down a pledge of value proportionable to the risk we may run at all events in crediting what he says; whether others with equal signs of knowledge, and veracity, and under the sanction of an equal pledge, report the contrary; and if any do, what farther reasons there may be found in the nature of the thing, or the number of additional vouchers on either side, for assenting to this or that testimony.

Here now are several things to be remarked, before we apply these rules to the trial of Christian faith; as first, that faith is built on self-evidence, and rational proof; on

the former, inasmuch as we read or hear the report, and so have sensible evidence, that the report is made; on the latter, inasmuch as we weigh the reasons brought to support or invalidate its truth, to vouch for the credit, or prove the fallacy of the reporter; and judge for ourselves of the merits.

Secondly, it is to be remarked, that no degree of testimony can make a thing credible, as long as the mind deems it impossible; but, that in numberless cases, as the human mind is utterly unable to fix the real limits between possible and impossible, so it should be cautious of setting up imaginary ones, especially, if the whole matter attested, with its real possibility or impossibility, lies either at, or beyond the utmost verge of our natural capacities. It is hard finding mediums, and making distinctions, by the force, I mean, of mere reason, in things we see not at all, or very dimly.

Thirdly, it is to be observed, that when the matter attested is naturally improbable, the degree of testimony must be proportionably the greater, to be rationally believed. There is nothing the mind more readily fixes for itself than its set of probabilities, and improbabilities, the greater part of the materials, tools, and furniture of that chamber in the understanding, which belongs peculiarly to opinion. Yet between what they are, and what they ought to be, there is, in most minds, an immense difference, and, of course, an inexhaustible source of error.

Fourthly, we find, that knowledge, whether self-evident, or demonstrated, or believed, may be equally, and absolutely certain, the different methods of arriving at it making no difference in the degree of assent given to the truths it consists of. It is, for instance, equally certain to me who never saw him, that there was a Sir Isaac Newton; as it is, that any one demonstration in his book of mathematical principles, is a true and real demonstration; and of the truth again of that demonstration I am as certain, as fully convinced, as I am that I see the words of the demonstration in his book.

Lastly, experience puts it beyond all rational question, that as the will, in most minds, is greatly swayed by the affections and passions, so the understanding in the same minds is equally governed by the will, apprehending, judging, believing, or forbearing these acts, or performing them

with more vigour, in regard to some subjects, and with less in regard to others, as the will, biassed by pleasure, prejudice, or interest, directs. Hence it comes, that men, who have the same capacities and lights, think so very differently, and know, the one so much less than the other; and while one conceitedly erects his opinions into axioms, another, as conceitedly, reduces the axioms of all mankind into doubts, denying the certainty of every thing. This power, or rather usurpation on the prerogative of reason, seems to be carried farther in matters of faith, than in those of demonstration; but really is not, for men believe only as they judge of the arguments for and against believing, so that every proof of arbitrary believing is an equal proof of arbitrary judging.

This is that very freethinking, which many contend for, without knowing it, who at the same time insist that judgment and belief, in all things, necessarily follow evidence. Men judge freely, say they, who cannot help in the same instance, concluding after a certain manner. Is not this a contradiction? So indeed it seems. But both sides of a contradiction must be received as true, if they do not lie too close, when there is a necessity for it; and there is nothing so good at creating such necessities, as the will, when at a pinch, and strongly stimulated.

By this view of faith in general, as distinct from our other ways of acquiring knowledge, we come prepared to conceive in a clearer manner, than otherwise we should be able to do, the nature of Christian faith; and by the rules and remarks already suggested, and presently to be applied to the particular purpose of that faith, shall be able to make our way through some difficulties, not so easy by other means to be avoided.

The Christian faith now is, a strong assent of the rational soul to the truth of God's promises, and a resolute determination of the will and heart to close with the conditions annexed to those promises, in the gospel covenant. Or Christian faith is, with a clear conviction of the understanding, and an entire resignation of the will and heart, firmly to confide in, ardently to love, and dutifully to obey the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, in whose name, and by whose co-operation, we are reformed, pardoned,

sanctioned and made the children of God in the covenant of baptism.

So far as the assent is given to, or this conviction raised by, the mere force of reason, influenced only by the evidence for Christianity, it is of the same nature with the belief, that there was such a man as Cæsar, and such a city as Babylon; and that faith which rests solely on the sufficiency of the vouchers for our religion, and the arguments brought to support it, is but human or historical faith. But human as it is, if we examine it by the rules or tests laid down for that purpose, we shall find it built on a foundation, never to be shaken in a rational and considering mind.

First, the miracles attested, which make the proofs, and in part, the very matter of this faith, are neither impossible, for God was able to perform them, and all we see and know of his creation, is at least equally miraculous.

Nor, secondly, at all improbable, since it may be rationally presumed, that he who wrought so many miracles for our temporary accommodation here, might think fit to work some, were they needful, for our reformation and eternal happiness hereafter. That a teacher, sent from God for these purposes, was necessary, Socrates and Plato, who saw that necessity before he came, are sufficient vouchers; and our own reason tells us, he could never have satisfactorily proved his mission, but by miracles. Miracles therefore, to be performed for that purpose, were probable before his coming into the world, and consequently when performed, proved uncontestably, that he came from God.

Thirdly, as to the means of knowledge, both in point of capacity, and opportunity, in the reporters of our Saviour's history they were unquestionably sufficient. They could hear his doctrines, and they could see his miracles, as well as men of higher education. The testimony they have given of both is ample, clear, and preserved with more care and scrupulosity by far, than any other record known to mankind.

Fourthly, the integrity of these reporters is as little to be questioned, on the footing of historical credit, as their means of knowledge. No men ever gave more or higher proofs of their honesty than they did, which appears,

Fifthly, from the impossibility of their having had any

manner of worldly interest in our belief of their testimony. So far were they from this, that poverty, persecution, and contempt, were all the rewards in this life their master promised them, or they met with, for being his witnesses; whereas had they declined the painful and terrible office, they might have followed their worldly business as profitably, and passed their days as comfortably, as other men.

Sixthly, to encourage our faith, and leave us no room for suspicion, they laid down two pledges of the greatest value to themselves, and of the most unquestionable security to us, for the truth of all they attested, namely, their lives and their souls; their lives, by dying freely and resolutely under the hands of men who had no quarrel with them, but on account of their obstinacy in preaching Christ and his resurrection to the world; and their souls, which nothing could so effectually have destroyed for ever, as knowingly and wilfully endeavouring to pass on mankind a system of religious lies and impostures. Known fallacies have no martyrs.

Lastly, There are not any, there never could have been any witnesses to attest a report contrary to that made by the Christian witnesses, that is, to attest a whole history of negatives, such as, that there were no such persons as Christ and his apostles, or, that they wrought no such miracles, preached no such doctrines, wrote no such books, as the Scriptures. There never was one man who had any opportunity of knowing the truth or nullity of these facts, that so much as offered to lay down the smallest pledge, not to say his life or his soul, to prove any such nullity. The witnesses therefore for the truth of Christianity, who were many thousands in number (for I take in all that wrought or saw the miracles) all competent in means of knowledge, all honest, all martyrs or confessors for the truth of their report, stand unopposed by any contrary witnesses, and even backed by the testimony, in several particulars, of bitter enemies to Christ and his religion, especially the Jews of his time, who knew there were such persons, as he and his apostles, who owned them as preachers of the religion, writers of the books, and workers of the miracles, we ascribe to them. Nay, the Jews of all ages since allow the reality of our Saviour's miracles, but attribute them, as his contemporary Jews did, to the power of an evil spirit.

Supposing now, that the man, so often already mentioned as cured by Christ of his blindness, should have staggered the incredulity of some rational Jew, by constantly maintaining the reality of the miracle wrought on him; and by the just and powerful reasonings from thence, which we find he made use of immediately after the fact; and supposing the Jew thus wavering, should hear a large body of men, in the same peremptory manner attesting the other miracles, particularly the resurrection of Christ; should see them perform themselves a number of miracles, as much above, or contrary to nature; and should see them cheerfully offer themselves to the most tormenting sorts of death, rather than renounce their testimony, or even bury it in silence, must he not give up his reason, or yield his assent?

Hence, on the whole, it is plain that the faith of the first Christians was built on self-evidence, or the testimony of their senses, for they saw the miracles with their eyes; and heard the doctrines with their ears, which together constitute the evidence and matter of Christian faith. We also have the testimony of our senses for the reality of a written record, wherein those miracles and doctrines are attested. So far our faith hath, all along, stood on a foundation furnished by primary and incontestible truths.

The secondary or demonstrative truths deduced from those primary or self-evident axioms, at first did, do now, and for ever will, lend it all their lights. The unanswerable reasonings of him who was cured of his blindness, are to the full as cogent now as ever, if the record is admitted as true and genuine.

That it is both, is evident from its having been made on the spot where, and at the time when, the miracles were wrought, and the doctrines delivered, and universally examined by those living witnesses who could have easily detected its falsity, had it been unfaithfully drawn up; and would as surely have exposed that falsity if detected; for why should they have died for a record which they knew to be false?

That the record once made, was preserved in its original purity, immaterial and unavoidable variations notwithstanding, is demonstrable, first, from the sacredness of the re-

cord itself, which could not be corrupted without the most impious sacrilege; secondly, from the infinity of copies and translations, continually and carefully perused by all the churches; and thirdly, but more especially, from the perpetual appeals to this record, made in all ages, by the different sects of Christians, each intensely watchful over all the rest, and over all their copies or translations, and ever recalling them, in case of material deviations, to a collation with the original.

Could such reasonings as these be fairly offered for the divinity of a religion, only not absurd, superstitious, or hurtful in its nature and tendency, they must prove satisfactory, or reason itself must be given up. But when they are brought in their full force for a religious system, as evidently and confessedly divine in the wisdom, utility, nay, necessity of its doctrines and ordinances, as it is here proved to be in its miraculous attestations, how is it possible for wickedness itself, though abetted by prejudice, to withstand their force? Could philosophy with her utmost efforts, have found out a system, capable, in any tolerable degree, of clearing up the doubts, rectifying the corruptions, or ensuring the happiness of mankind, though vouched by no divine interpositions, a slight pretence for resting in that philosophy might with some colour have been set up. But when it is found, as it really is, that the true wisdom can be obtained, the true righteousness promoted, and the true, the temporal and eternal happiness of all men established, on the principles of Christian faith alone; and farther, that God hath incontestibly proved these principles, as is really the case, to be his own immediate dictates, by his own immediate miraculous interpositions; what room is left for infidelity? None in reason; none any where, but in wilful blindness and wickedness. A report made by innumerable witnesses, sealed with their blood, and established on unanswerable demonstrations, deduced from indisputable axioms, is evidence, or there is no such thing among mankind. The matter of our faith in the gospel, no less, I will be bold to say, even more, than in the assassination of Cæsar is matter of certainty; and so are our hopes founded on that faith. The expression therefore, 'sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life,' is more strictly pro-

per and logical, than hath been commonly imagined. We must either believe, or do violence to our own reason, which tells us, that, if there is any such thing as truth, it must be found in a religion, so very agreeable to reason, so absolutely necessary to the virtue and happiness of mankind, and so vouched as a record of facts, that all history must be false, all countries, persons, transactions, which have not fallen immediately under the cognizance of our senses, must have no being. We must therefore either be Christians, or divest ourselves of reason, and be brutes. We must believe, or renounce, the immortality of our souls. We must be Christians, or nothing.

It is true, there are many things delivered to our faith in the record mentioned, which are not only miraculous, but highly mysterious also. This, however, is no reason why they should be thought impossible, or even improbable, by a mind wholly mysterious to itself, clothed in a body, and surrounded with a world, altogether mysterious and miraculous, both in their origin and formation. Infidelity, in the face of such evidence as hath been here sketched out, is no less mysterious, and would seem as miraculous, were it not universally known, that men have a power of turning away their attention from evidence, when they do not relish either it or its consequences; that weak arguments are sufficient to make a man judge as he is previously inclined to do; and that the strongest, cannot bring his reluctant understanding to a determination in spight of him.

Having said what time would allow on the evidence of Christian faith, as purely rational, human, and historical; I shall now proceed to take a short view of that faith as efficacious and divine, that you may understand, how, 'from faith to faith the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel.'

This method, pointed out by the text, appeared highly proper to me, because we must freely believe as men and rational creatures, whose faith God will not force, ere we can believe as Christians. The spirit will not inspire that which it is the peculiar office of right reason to inculcate; but will improve, by grace, that which we have already acquired in a due use of the natural faculties, and revealed instructions afforded us.

So far as our faith in Christ is founded on rational evidence only, it is merely human and historical. So far as its assent is rendered strong and powerful in the understanding by the evidence of the spirit, and impressed effectually on the heart and will by the grace of God, it is called a lively, operative, saving, or divine faith, which never takes place in any man, before the human or historical faith hath laid a foundation for it. Christianity, or the faith of Christians, considered as the basis, is founded on reason only; but Christianity, considered as the superstructure, is not founded on argument, but on the grace of God. The affecting to overlook this distinction, gave occasion to one of the shrewdest pieces of sophistry ever levelled against our religion.

That this distinction is neither notional nor chimerical, appears plainly from experience, which supplies us with frequent instances of men, equally and thoroughly satisfied, on rational grounds, with the arguments for Christian faith, who nevertheless differ widely in their lives and conversations; and of others, who differ almost as much in their degrees of assent, though all assenting on the same arguments, and equally strangers to doubting. St. James was well aware of all this distinction, when he mentioned the faith of devils, who probably believe on as rational and convincing evidence of a judgment to come, as the immediate disciples of our Saviour did; yet only fear and tremble in consequence of their faith, because their forced unsanctified faith hath no effect on their wills, nor of course on their morals.

It is one thing barely to believe, and another to believe in a lively manner. Reason alone can guide us to the former; God's Holy Spirit only can lead us up to the latter. In like manner, there is a wide difference between speculatively believing with the understanding only, and practically believing with that and the heart also. This we owe to the grace of God, that to a due use of our rational faculties. He who believes historically as a rational creature, hath entered the porch of faith; but cannot pass into the temple, nor warm himself at the altar, without believing with all his heart, without feeling his will and affections engaged. So infinitely sweet are the promises, so infinitely dreadful the

menaces, whereon the eye of faith is fixed, that a mere historical believer appears a phenomenon of the most amazing kind, when nothing but faith and reason are considered. But experience presents us with so many instances of such believers, as reduce this phenomenon to a common occurrence, and shew, that more than human aid is required to open a passage between the head and heart, for the descent and operation of conviction.

To every one thus believing, such is the goodness of God, this aid is afforded; but many, such is the perverseness of human nature, and such the power of our enemy, barricade that passage against the Holy Spirit, who will not force his way.

In these, faith degenerates into fear; but rises and improves into hope in those, who, not satisfied, that their heads should pull one way, and their hearts another, are determined to go, with the whole man, in the way of salvation; and therefore pursuing the path of their own rational convictions, and heartily concurring with the great assistant, they give themselves up to meditation, devotion, mortification, and labour, which nothing can force them to intermit, till their hearts and wills are as warmly attached to the gospel of Christ, as their understandings are clearly convinced of its truths. The gospel, as a system, wherein the principles of faith and virtue are essentially incorporated, having taken an entire possession of these men, 'the righteousness of God is revealed, from faith to faith,' in the holiness and goodness of their lives, which give evident proofs of a power more than human.

Having already, I fear, exhausted the time usually given to discourses of this kind, in laying before you the nature, evidence, and progress of Christian faith, I shall conclude with exhibiting a small sample of its fruits.

St. Paul, in a catalogue of these, calls faith, 'the substance or support of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' His meaning is, that Christian faith, once received and perfected in the mind of a believer, serves as a principle or axiom for the establishment of many other comfortable truths, which can no otherwise be discovered or proved; such, for instance, among others, as these, that 'through faith we obtain remission of sins,' peace with God,

and eternal life, the grant of all we pray for, comfort under afflictions, and victory over the world.

It is faith that cleanses our affections, raises them from 'things on earth, and sets them on things above,' by discovering to us their real natures, and teaching us how to choose on the comparison: though an unbeliever may by experience perceive, that the enjoyments of this world are uncertain, and unsatisfactory; yet he can hardly think any thing else of much consequence to him. But if he ever becomes a convert to Christianity, how is he surprised to see, by the light of this faith, himself, and every thing about him, appear so very different from what they did before! to see the size, the weight, the colour of every thing changed! to see gain and loss, good and evil, happiness and misery, shifting sides on his apprehension and judgment! to see the true cause of his former mistakes, namely, the great deceiver, and his four assistants, imagination, passion, appetite, and custom, transforming the things, as well as persons, of this world, in order to an universal masquerade! giving splendor to infamy, and contempt to merit! by an inverted art of painting bestowing beauty on deformity, and ugliness on that which is lovely! by a preposterous art of cookery infusing nauseousness into things the most delicious, and sweetening poison, seasoning ordure, and perfuming brimstone. He is amazed to see how the things of this world, are by these artists tinselled for the vain, gilded for the covetous, and aggrandized for the ambitious; and more amazed still, when he perceives into what a despicable meanness they are sunk again by that prospect of immortality and eternal life, which true faith sets before him.

It is this faith, which turns our very infirmities into virtues; our fear (God being made its object) into 'wisdom and strong confidence;' and our sense of shame into humility, chastity, and honesty. This derives redoubled vigour on the mind and conscience even from our falls, at once demonstrating and 'making perfect the strength of God in our weakness.' This sweetens and sanctifies correction. This gives calm within, when all is tempest without. This makes day-light in the mind, when there is night only in the world, confusion in the pursuits of men, and mystery in the schemes of Providence. This clearly shews us our path, or safely

leads us by the hand through that we cannot see. This, when the means of useful knowledge are afforded, rouses our attention, opens and sharpens the eyes of our understandings; and this, when the nature of God's works, the drifts of his providence, or the depths of his religion become, in any instance, unfathomable to the scanty line of our reason, this faith, this evidence of things unseen, shuts the eyes of the soul again, and lays it to rest on a downy resignation, and in the fortress of a comfortable trust, that all is right, or will be well.

Behold here that tree of life, to which all may come, striking its roots deep into the rock of God's promises; rising towards heaven with a strong and lofty stem; defying the blasts of persecution in one age, of sophistry in another, and of ridicule in all; sheltering virtue and civil society under its extended branches; feeding the Christian, to the stature of a saint, with its fruits of hope, charity, peace, contentment, patience, joy; and crowning the martyr with its leaves.

Having said enough for the present on this necessary, and inexhaustible subject, I shall here finish with beseeching the God of hope 'to fill you with all joy and peace in believing,' through 'Christ Jesus, the author, and finisher of our faith,' to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, now and for evermore. Amen.

DISCOURSE XLVII.

INFIDELITY IS OF THE HEART.

HEB. III. 12.

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief.

THE exhortation here, to take heed, had been impertinent and absurd, were it not in some measure within the power of the persons exhorted, to shun the thing to be heeded or guarded against. To bid a man beware of an evil, is to suppose, he may by taking care, avoid it, if he pleases. Now, the thing we are cautioned in this precept to beware of, and to prevent or correct in ourselves, is 'an evil heart of unbelief,' in which caution there is nothing of depth or obscurity, as soon as the word, heart, is once rightly understood, I mean, in the apostle's use of it, who in other passages makes the heart the seat of faith, and consequently here, of its opposite, unbelief.

By this word the Scriptures of both testaments frequently express the whole mind or understanding, as well as particularly the passions and affections, to which latter sense it is, that the custom of speaking hath now commonly confined its meaning. In Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, and, I believe, in the generality of cultivated languages, there are, at fewest, three words to express that in man, which is taken for the principle of thought, life and action. There are three also in English, spirit, soul, and mind. It is probable this diversity of terms was not owing to accident, nor the use of it introduced at random, not only in regard that so many knowing nations have given into it, and, when they speak precisely, apply the terms with some variety of meanings; but because a like distinction is observable in the operations of thought itself. Almost all the learned ancients, and many among the moderns, observing, that in man there is a rational spirit, an animal soul, and, as it were, between these, a mind or will, which is some-

times determined from above, by the rational powers, and sometimes from below, by the animal affections; have distinguished these by those names, and asserted the real existence of three immaterial substances, united into one human person, or man.

Such proofs may be given for the truth of this theory, as are sufficient to place it on a level with other approved systems, struck out by rational speculations on the internal part of our nature. One simple principle, whether of thought, motion, or action, always produces simple uniform effects, never clashing with, or counteracting itself. But there is no man, who does not, on many occasions, experience in his own breast a good deal of dispute and opposition in forming his judgments or opinions, and in taking his consequent resolutions. In moral matters more especially, we frequently find reason pleading within us for one thing, and passion or affection, for another, for the contrary; and the will, at first suspended between both, and then determined, sometimes by the former, and sometimes by the latter, as either occasionally preponderates, the baffled disputant, for a while at least, after the decision, discovering a sensible reluctance. This, well considered, will go near to evince the probability of three immaterial principles, now expressed as distinct, and then as constituting, by an union wholly mysterious, but one person, in every individual; and this perhaps will be found the best reason for saying, that man is formed in the image of God. The Scriptural writers, particularly St. Paul, give great countenance to this way of thinking.

That apostle speaks, 1 Thess. v. 23. of the spirit, soul and body, as distinct; and in many places puts the body, or flesh, for the brutal or animal soul, from whence we have our sensations, appetites, affections and passions. This last is what we call the heart, and what in my text he means peculiarly by the word, as appears by his ascribing to it an evil disposition or reluctance to faith. Accordingly elsewhere he catalogues heresy, or a lower degree of unbelief, among the works of the flesh, the heart, or the animal ingredient in man.

Faith is plainly a principle of no power in morality, but in proportion as it is able to determine the will; and it can

be secure of the will, only in proportion as it can subdue and influence the lower part of our composition, as well as convince the higher. Although this is not only the Scriptural, but also the rational account of faith, our unbelievers nevertheless, unable to digest the imputation of spurning at the Christian faith, merely through the corruptions of a refractory heart, insist, that faith is an act of pure intellect only, which say they, necessarily closes with apparent evidence, but is almost always misled by appearances. Thus, under their objections to the validity of Christian evidence, they endeavour to conceal the depravity of their own wills, and are for calling that reason and sagacity in themselves, which, in reality, is no more than a redundancy and prevalence of the animal within them; and this in time captivates even their rational faculties to the sophistical service of infidelity. Quite opposite to this is the case of a true believer, whose lower mind, once thoroughly attached to religion, serves only to quicken his convictions. The believing animal in him stirs up the sleeping angel; and even the cackling of faith often awakens his drowsy reason to the defence of her capitol.

That 'the evil heart of unbelief,' against which you are cautioned and forewarned by the apostle, may not be found in you, give me leave to state those objections to the Christian faith, which the infidel draws from his corrupted heart, and afterward shapes in his pliant head to a shew of reason, that what springs from the viler part of his nature may seize the nobler part of yours; and then be pleased to hear the answers.

He says, it is plain by our disputes about faith, that we know not what it is; that faith in general is an act of pure intellect; that Christian faith is a belief of speculative points, wherewith morality is not concerned; that it is involuntary, so that, if the evidence is sufficient, we must believe, if otherwise, it is impossible, or at least absurd, to believe; that therefore it can neither be virtuous and rewardable to believe, nor vicious and punishable to do the contrary; that although faith itself were voluntary, yet the infinite rewards proposed to it, and punishments threatened to unbelief, make both faith itself, and all its effects mercenary, and consequently destroy the very nature of virtue; and that faith

of any kind is seldom found, but in weak or superstitious minds.

In the first place, if disputes about any point were a proof, that the disputants on both sides know nothing of the matter in question, what would become of all contests in other sciences, and the contenders? Do the physicians know nothing of the human body, because they differ so much among themselves about the causes of its distempers and their cures? Do the lawyers know nothing of the law, because our suits are so long a settling, and, after infinite disputing, are hardly ever settled to the satisfaction of both sides, whether lawyers, or clients?

But still more to our purpose; are we to conclude, that all men are ignorant of religion, its opposers as well as defenders, because they still dispute? If we know not what we vindicate, it is possible our adversaries may know as little, what it is they attack.

In the second place, were faith in general an act of pure intellect, how comes it to pass that we are hardly ever disinterested either in the points we believe or disbelieve? To arguments or attestations for such propositions as we esteem of no moment to us, we give no attention, and therefore form no opinions either way about them. It is always somewhat pleasing or displeasing, somewhat we desire, or would avoid, that fixes our attention on any kind of report and its vouchers; and this somewhat never fails to accompany our assent or dissent, giving growth and strength to either, according as it leans its weight. The whole man, animal, as well as rational, concurs to the judgment formed, and is pleased, grieved, or frightened, as fast as convinced. Even as to matters purely speculative, if any such there are, curiosity and vanity engage the heart as warmly sometimes, as interest in regard to points of the nearest concernment; and once a man hath espoused an opinion, though of no moment to any mortal, he loves and maintains it, now that it is his own, with as much fondness, as he does his wife, whom he wedded without beauty, merit or fortune, merely to please his fancy. The merchant, who never stirred out of England, firmly believes there is such a place as Calecut in the East Indies, believes it with pleasure, because he hopes to double his fortune in ten years by a trade to

that factory; and will not, without the utmost proofs, be persuaded, that the place, with one half of his fortune, is now in the enemy's hands. Is this all pure intellect? Two opposite lawyers, though neither caring one farthing for his cause or client, will wrangle, even to outrage, about the merits of a testimony, that is, about an article of faith. Is all this, the passion, the noise, the ill words, the foam, pure intellect? No, saith the objector, it is only the heart intruding on the office of reason; and I say, the objection is but the spawn of a passive understanding, forced to bear and nurse the bastard issue of an 'evil heart.'

In the third place, were Christian faith, in the objector's own opinion, a belief of points wholly speculative, it is very strange, he should nevertheless represent it as a mercenary principle, which destroys the very nature of virtue. But the points, he says, are in themselves speculative. Not all of them surely; not these, that God will one day judge the world, and reward every man according to his deeds. Here certainly morality is somewhat concerned. Yes, too much, he insists; and instances the doctrine of the Trinity as wholly speculative and tending, in no measure, to the reformation or happiness of mankind. The objection is the child of gross ignorance in the Deist, and of as gross falsehood in the Arian. Besides, that this doctrine is interwoven and necessarily connected with the entire system of Christian morality; I would ask the objector, whether Deist or Arian, what can concern a man more, as a moral agent, than a clear conviction, that he who by covenant adopts him for a son and heir of eternal life, is, or is not God? that he who redeems him from eternal misery by his blood, is, or is not God? that he who enables him to keep the covenant, and make his 'adoption sure,' is, or is not God? and that it is his duty to love, confide in, and adore, one only, or three Gods? Take this matter either way, whether as a Catholic, or an Arian, and it is highly practical and moral, if there is a right and wrong in the conduct of man towards God; if there is morality or goodness in a right application of devotion to the proper object; if the 'evil heart of unbelief' will but tolerate the first, as well as second table of God's law.

Were we to try the fourth objection, which makes both faith, and (to serve the present turn) infidelity, involuntary,

not by airy speculations, but by real facts and experiments, we should find it wholly absurd. If one man assents to the truth of Christianity, he is forced truly by its evidences; but if another continues in infidelity, then the evidence is defective; that is, without any alteration in itself, it is both sufficient and insufficient. Who sees not that this difference proceeds from the difference of minds, thus embracing or rejecting it? Now place this difference of minds in what you will, it cannot shew itself, without liberty at least, in one of the parties; but by the objection, no man is at liberty to dissent from sufficient, nor to assent to insufficient evidence. The truth is, every man hath it in his power to give, or refuse attention to the vouchers for our faith. So far every man is free to make the first step towards faith or infidelity. The exercise of freedom in the second is not so intelligible, though it is equally certain. We cannot see how it is that a man opens his mind to one point, and shuts it against another, when the reasons for both are offered, as we see him shew the outward signs of attention or neglect; and yet there is nothing more evident, than that every man hath a power of doing this, hath something which I would call an internal or mental ear, where the will exercises an authority over the notices or arguments that had been admitted or forced in through the outward senses, stopping some, and suffering others to pass under the farther attention and consideration of the mind. Every man finds more or less within himself, and in all other men. If there is any such thing as freethinking, properly so called, it consists in making both these steps without force or restraint, that is, in opening not only the outward, but inward door both of the rational and animal soul, to all sorts of religious knowledge, approaching with a sober appearance. That man is not free to think right, who cannot think wrong, as he only is at liberty to do good, who can do evil. It must be confessed, there are attested truths, which no man in his senses can avoid believing. But then there are a far greater number of others, against which so much may be plausibly said, that there is room enough left for interest, prejudice, &c. to strike in, and help the mind to believe, or disbelieve, as it pleases.

In the fifth place, if it is in any measure a work of the heart to believe in the gospel; if this belief is in any de-

gree practical; and if believing or not believing, is at all in our election; then so far is Christian faith an exercise of freedom, and therefore may be a virtue. To make it highly such, nothing more is required, but that he who embraces it, should have done this on rational conviction, and have been previously acquainted with the severity of its morality. Now as there is no going rationally into this faith by halves; but the whole man, understanding, heart, will, passions, affections, must either receive it all, or reject it all; it is easy to conceive how a choice of faith or infidelity comes to be made, on motives of virtue or vice, in any mind; the arguments for faith, whether sufficient or not, still remaining the same in themselves. If the Christian system of morals is virtuous, then he who gives a close attention to those arguments, is so far virtuous and rewardable; and he who refuses such attention, so far vicious and punishable; chiefly indeed on this account, that the giver voluntarily and ingenuously seeks for arguments to enforce on his mind a principle of self-denial and mortification; he courts the frowns of virtue; while the refuser basely courts the smiles of vice, and turns a deaf ear to every argument for Christianity, because he is determined to have no internal check upon his inclinations, nothing to 'reprove his evil deeds.'

But virtue, the objector says, consists in action, not in articles of faith; and I ask, who ever acted rightly, that had not first thought justly? what are actions without principles? or may not an article of faith become a principle of action? what if I should say, all virtue consists entirely in principle, in the principles, whereby the passions are corrected, and the will governed? He surely may be a man of high virtue, who outwardly cannot act at all; and every one knows, there is a great deal of good done in the world, for which the doers deserve to be severely punished.

But although it should be granted, that virtue consists only in action, may we not ask, whether this is the action of soul or body? Of the soul undoubtedly, for the body acts not, but is acted on. Faith then may be an action; and the saying of our Saviour, sometimes sneered at, be found highly proper, 'this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.' If God did really send him, to believe on him, and take up the cross, and follow him, which

are not so much consequences, as essential ingredients of that belief, must be, not only a work, but a work of virtue, truly great in itself, and highly pleasing to God.

But, waving the whole argument on the subject of free-thinking in regard to faith; is there no virtue where the judgment is compelled, and the action, naturally resulting from that judgment, is in itself a good action? Is not murder unlawful? Yes. Is it possible for reason to judge otherwise of it? No. Is not the heart struck with horror at the thoughts of committing it? It is.

Is not the abhorrence of murder, in itself, and previous to all acts of tenderness and humanity, a virtuous principle? Does the acknowledged force on our judgment in this case take away all hope of reward from him who generously forgives his enemy, and bestows him his life, when he hath him in his power, as David did by Saul? Was it no virtue in David thus to spare a life spent in repeated attempts to take away his? Or does it follow, that because God gave us our reason, freedom, and moral sense of horror at the crime, it is therefore no virtue to avoid it? Now, faith, whether the effect of reason or grace, is equally the gift of God. Were its evidence compulsory, it would be but on a footing with the moral sense. But whereas its evidence may be freely rejected or embraced; and whereas its genuine fruits are seen in an absence of every vice, and the production of every virtue; how gross is the bigotry of our infidels who will not allow it to be virtuous! These men must give up their principle, or confess, they themselves have no virtue, but when they judge by faculties, not received from God, and choose their own convictions independent of evidence.

To conclude on this head, reason hath its influence on the will; but passion, appetite, affection, have theirs too; and the will, guided by the one party, tramples on the other, and determines in all such debates, as this about the vouchers for Christian faith, whether evidence shall, or shall not be received; whether, in case it should chance to be obtruded, it shall, or shall not be considered; and if considered, whether with that care and impartiality which a matter of such high concernment demands.

Of all men, I should think there was least occasion for proving to one who is now a libertine in principle, only be-

cause he was first a libertine in practice, that the heart or animal part of us, by one means or other, prompts the mind to some opinions, or withholds it from others, and leads men into, or out of principles. Were it not that the animal is very predominant in him, he might easily be made sensible, that Christian faith is so far from being no virtue, that it is really a perfect summary, and the highest improvement of all virtues. True philosophy had reduced all the virtues to one, that is, fortitude. And what is true fortitude, but confidence? or true confidence, but faith and trust, not in fortune, not in the multitude, not in man, the dependence of fools; not in ourselves, the dependence of vain and conceited fools; but in God, in almighty wisdom and goodness? Is not this faith, temperance, inasmuch as it keeps us within the bounds of moderation, when appetite and desire allure us to excess? Is it not prudence, as it shews us the true, the important end, or chief good, of our being, and points to the means of attaining that end? Is it not justice, as it fixes our eyes on the final determination of our lot before the tribunal of unerring rectitude, and bids us make the justice of God the rule and motive of all our actions? And is it not fortitude, as it preserves us undaunted and invincible in all trials?

As to the sixth objection, that the rewards and punishments proposed to faith and infidelity, make faith itself and all its effects mercenary, and so destroy the very nature of virtue; let the infidel himself shew, that faith follows evidence, and cannot be bribed by rewards; and that infidelity is never found but for want of evidence, and therefore cannot be terrified by punishments. For our own part, we shall readily and humbly confess the effects of our faith to be mercenary, if it is mercenary to embrace virtue, not only for her own beauty, but for her dowry of endless honour and happiness; if it is mercenary to love her for the sake of her author and giver; and to do good on some reason, and for some end. Nay, we confess farther, that whereas she is sometimes exceedingly shocking to our weak and degenerate nature, we stand in need of her highest encouragements to preserve us steadily attached to her.

Vice, on the other hand, does not always look so ugly, as they who have taken her to pieces, report her. She paints

with infinite art, wears all dresses, especially those most in fashion, keeps the best company, and by candle-light eclipses all the other beauties. Now, rather than fall into her hands, we are humble enough to bless our faith for shewing us her serpentine tail and sting. It may be mercenary, it may be mean-spirited and slavish, to owe our safety to this sight; but it can never destroy the nature of our virtue, which disdains not the use of fear, if it were but for this reason, that God hath made it a part of our nature, and that for excellent purposes, as not only we, but all the legislators that ever lived, have found by experience. We even presume to think, that a small mixture of our gross mercenary hopes and fears would do no harm in the philosophic virtue of our acquaintances, were it but just enough to make it visible, for really at present their love of virtue and hatred of vice, are so excessively refined, that, to ordinary eyes, the difference is hardly perceptible.

The last objection, that faith of any kind is seldom found, but in weak and superstitious minds, is to be understood as a flout at the professors of all traditionary religions, rather than as a reflection deserving notice. I should perhaps have said nothing of it here, were it not strongly echoed by a pretended party of Christians, the Arians, I mean, who cry up morality and run down faith, as if the one were just going to destroy the other. This however they did not do, till they had first vilified the person of Christ, who promises salvation to faith. For my part, who own no speculative principles of religion, who look on the heart and will as equally concerned with the understanding, in every thing to be believed, I cannot help regarding these distinctions between articles of faith and principles of practice, as laying the pick-axe to the very foundation of Christianity, as separating its soul from its body. However, as they cried up the one only to run down the other, they have of late made equally free with both, and improved so well on the casuistry of the Jesuits, that an equivocation comes as readily to them in practice, as in speculation; and if we will but put ourselves for a little time under their tuition, we who could not practise as we formerly believed, may have the pleasure to hope, we shall soon believe, as we now practise.

Be this as it will, it is but charity to wish these overgrown moralists, together with their friends, the more sceptical kind of Deists, an island or world to themselves; that they might fully experience the sweets of living without histories of past times; without any records of rights, titles, properties, prior to their newly acquired possessions; without magistrates, for who is to be trusted with power? Without trials or witnesses, for there is to be no report; without borrowing, lending, sending, or receiving messages, or transacting business of any kind by others; without a possibility of extending commerce farther, than each person could carry his own goods, and bring back what he buys; without honesty; or at least, for want of trust and confidence, without the use of it; abandoned to fraud, or perpetual suspicions of it, without remedy; unable to bear one another, or live together, and quite incredulous of any other world or island, to which they might escape. See what is lost by a want of faith! were it not as wise a way to believe every thing that is told one?

How circumscribed a being is man in point of knowledge, and of all that dignity and happiness which result from useful knowledge, if without faith! If shut in, and confined to the narrow limits of his own sensory! How little can he find out of those things which tend most to the improvement of his mind, and to the comfortable, not to say, ornamental accommodation of life, if he will not hear and believe, as well as see, feel, and taste; if he will not trust and confide, as well as demonstrate!

How, on the other hand, is he enlarged by faith in men! Seeing with the eyes of all men! Hearing with the ears of the whole species, from the earliest ages to the present, over the face of the whole earth! and cheaply appropriating to himself the dear-bought experience of all mankind! How much farther still are his views carried by divine faith into the real nature and use of things here, whereof the infidel sees only the surface! How far beyond these again, into regions of glorious, important, and otherwise unattainable knowledge! into new worlds! into the world of spirits, his kindred spirits! into the court, and to the throne of the heavenly king! into the abyss of his own immortality! into the abyss of almighty wisdom, exerted in the works of

creation and providence! into the abyss of almighty love exemplified in the condescension of a suffering and assisting God, for his eternal salvation, for his salvation, who had corrupted his own nature, proved ungrateful for all other blessings, and even persecuted his benefactor! Crucified his divine Redeemer!

What a narrow heart hath unbelief! How great a coward is the infidel! who dare not believe in these things because they are so great! who dare not believe in the miracles of Christ, notwithstanding reason tells him aloud, that these, though wrought for a greater purpose, are by no means so stupendous as those he sees, eats, drinks, breathes, every hour! who trembles at the thoughts of bringing a disingenuous, a lewd, a dastardly heart to the test of Christian morality! He hath not virtue enough so much as once to look his vices in the face. He shudders at the thoughts of reformation, and looks pale at the name even of mercy, if that of repentance is pronounced before it. What now must his infinite vanity do, thus miserably circumstanced? Why, he hath no shift left to keep that in countenance, but setting up for an immense stock of penetration, and consequently of contempt for faith, at the instant that he is a bankrupt to common sense and common honesty. He must be more than others, to conceal his being less. He must parry with a sneer, or bully in an harangue, that close encounter with reason on the merits of Christian faith, which he knows he cannot stand. How just is the sentence pronounced on him by the son of Syrach, 'Woe unto him that is faint-hearted, for he believeth not.' The character he would assume is that of sagacity and intrepidity. Infinite impudence! Whereas ignorance and timidity are the peculiar distinctions of his mind, and beget between them all his infidel suspicions. He knows not, such is his ignorance, how to distinguish error from truth; and observing how many impostures prevail in the world, he fears, such is his timidity, that every thing is imposture. His views are dark, short and narrow; and therefore suspicion is all he hath for precaution, just as other ignorants have cunning only for wisdom. He can neither be, nor have a friend, for he who cannot trust, cannot safely be trusted. Credulity, it is true, is a weakness, but hath the simplicity of a child to excuse it. Suspicion is a weakness

too; but then it is a vice also; and hath this to expose it, that the suspicious is always suspected of only imputing to others, what he is conscious of in himself. I dwell thus on suspicion, because the fearful and jealous temper gives essence 'to the evil heart of unbelief,' in the same manner and degree, as bravery or fortitude of mind constitute the good heart of faith. As this religious fortitude of faith is truly a virtue, the parent and patron of all other virtues; so this irreligious cowardice of infidelity is really a vice, the parent, the nurse, the patron of all other vices; at once idolizing through vanity, and sceptically extinguishing through fear, the reasoning faculty with which it is joined; at once haughtily dictating what never can be proved, and believing (for here it can only believe) that nothing is to be believed; at once peremptorily dogmatizing on precarious negatives, and miserably doubting, or impudently denying, positives, of the highest proof.

After all, we wrong the libertine in calling him an infidel, for in truth he does little else, as a thinker, but believe; and believes with a wider and prompter swallow, than the most credulous religionist.

As faith consists both in an assent of the understanding, and in the hopes, expectations, and wishes of the heart; so the negative faith of the libertine, as it regards his understanding, consists in believing, that God never made any revelation to mankind; that there were no such persons, as Christ, the prophets, and apostles; or if there were, that they wrought no miracles; and that they did not offer up their lives in testimony of a mission from God. So far as his faith is the faith of his heart, it consists in believing, that the soul will not, or, at worst, hoping that it may not, exist hereafter; and that there is no tempter, no place of torment; or if there are, that he will not always be a devil, nor that always a hell.

Howsoever hard it may be to prove a single one of these negatives (and certain it is, there can be no proof for any of them), yet he believes them all; and to get rid of the gospel history, believes in the falsity, or at least utter uncertainty, of all history. This faith begins in the heart, and is at first only a violent passion or desire of somewhat, which Christian faith would mortify. This desire soon improves

into a vehement wish for impunity on a full gratification. This wish looks out with extreme anxiety for arguments against the truth of Christianity; finds many, for all things are disputable in such a pinch; and finds them all demonstrative, for what is not, that indulges desire, and gratifies the wishes of a heart, so disposed. Thus the understanding, weak enough in itself, and ill informed as to the evidences of revelation, gives way, and resigns its assent to the pressing necessities o the whole man; and so faith is made perfect.

This faith now, as soon as it is firmly established in the mind, becomes the substance or support of fine things hoped for, such as, of life without sickness or end; of riches without bounds; of pleasures without control or satiety; of power unlimited; of honours above competition, beyond comparison, and even equal to ambition. This faith also becomes the evidence of these things, though as yet unseen; sufficient evidence to wishes so very fond, that all things thus hoped for, may, by an unwearied application of the virtues and good works, consequent to such a sort of faith, such as cunning, fraud, force, oppression, gaming, bribing, flattering, drinking, wenching, be fully obtained and enjoyed. It is true, nature itself, and all experience join to refute this evidence, but in vain. The believer I am speaking of, unshaken in his dependence on it, amidst the rub of accidents, crosses, disappointments, sickness, deaths, pursues that still unseen, untasted, unfelt contentment, hoped for on the evidence of his faith, to which he lives a confessor, and dies a martyr, fighting for a woman, or grasping his bag, or scheming the future grandeur of his family, or ordering a magnificent monument for his body. O the power of this faith! Great parent of all the heroism celebrated in profane history, and of ten thousand times more, as perfect, and as far pursued, in every rank and corner of the world, but modestly concealed from the registers of glory. How might Christian faith, in the present low ebb of her influence, envy thee the number and greatness of thy exploits, did she see with thy eyes! But, if we may believe her, the optics she employs, penetrate the present general masquerade of persons and things, and plainly discover, under all this show, a set of shocking realities, which draw

her tears, which drew the blood of her author, and which death, seen only by her, is stealing to lay bare under the uplifted arm of vengeance.

Men must cease to be men, before they cease to be believers. However, that believing depends, in a great measure, on ourselves, is, I think, plain enough to experience, as to the points, affirmatively or negatively to be believed. That believing in Christ is also, with its promised assistance, in our power, we Christians must infer from his command, 'ye believe in God, believe also in me;' for why a command when there is no power to perform? Or why shall he think it odd, that Christ should make faith in himself, and in the miraculous attestation of his mission, the matter of a command? he, I say, who will huff excessively, if not believed on his bare word. It is surely as reasonable to command belief, on high evidence, as to be angry at the want of it, on none.

It is plain to a man of true understanding, that his believing a well-attested truth depends on his admitting, that is, on his candidly weighing the evidence; and his not believing, on a neglect or refusal of that evidence. It is plain likewise, that he is at liberty to do either. It is plain therefore to him that a command to weigh the evidences of revealed religion, if they are found sufficient, is the same as a command to believe, and highly reasonable in itself. Sensible of this, and well aware of the mischiefs attending both the extremes of credulity and incredulity, in matters of religious faith, he keeps the medium, and casting the clear and steady eye of a well-poised judgment on both sides, with pity for the miserable weakness of those who believe every thing, and contempt for the pride of those who will believe nothing, he moves right on to his purpose with equal deliberation and expedition. He is resolute, because he knows he is right; and his wisdom serves him for fortitude. He does not take all men for cheats and liars, merely because he hath met with a majority of deceitful people; nor all religions for imposture, merely because he hath observed a clear proof of it in many. No, he is sure, there must be a true religion; he knows there must be sufficient signs and evidence of its truth; he knows what these

are; and, when he sees them, instead of doubting, trifling, hesitating belief, he closes boldly, understanding and heart, with that truth, and rests in it, as in the native element of his mind. Knowing his own corruptions, with their unhappy effect, and sensible, that Christian faith alone is qualified to reform them, in the spirit of an intellectual hero, he arms himself with that to subdue and govern the rebel animal within him. The animal first submits, then willingly receives the easy yoke, and afterward rejoices in it, as the glorious badge of moral liberty.

As faith is weak in some, dead in others, and even exposed to the danger of a total extinction in every man; it is the business of this man, as well as of other less determined believers, to pray earnestly 'that his faith fail not;' to meditate and watch, that 'he may stand fast in the faith;' to give his faith continual exercise in good works, lest he should be found at last to 'have believed in vain.'

It is an easy matter to profess Christianity, to follow its author, and crowd about him, as numbers do, some for a name; some for a cloak; some for the loaves; some for the bag, and what is put therein; most because they were bred up in this way, and would go any where in a crowd. But this is not 'to put on Christ' himself. It is only to clothe ourselves in his coat, as his enemies did, and still may do. It is not to join ourselves effectually to him, or to partake of his spirit, or to imbibe his power. Nothing, but a lively, operative, fruitful faith, can bring us into true contact and union with this source of spiritual health and life. To illustrate and urge a doctrine, so necessary to be feelingly understood and received, take a fact, which may serve on this occasion as a parable.

As Jesus is going with a ruler of the synagogue to heal his daughter, behold what multitudes of people follow him! how they throng him! how they press on him from all sides, and, with a mixture of admiration and rudeness would rather incommode and jostle him, than be thrown at a distance! Of all this crowd that hang so close upon him, one poor distempered woman only was healed of her disease. He felt the touch of faith; and 'perceiving that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about and said, who touched my clothes?'

This question astonished even his professed disciples. 'Thou seest,' said they, 'the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, who touched me?'

The Christian world may see itself in this crowd. How many thousands of us do but shoulder the Saviour of the world, by our formal, nominal, interested, hypocritical professions! rather hindering his progress, than forwarding our own, towards the true ends of religion! while one in a multitude hath faith sufficient to extract that virtue from him, by which alone the cure of our spiritual maladies can be wrought! what signify professions! what indeed signifies preaching, as I do! or hearing as you do! if, for want of this faith, no power is drawn, even from the fountain of power, to invigorate the former, or enliven the latter!

May the God of hope, my brethren, impress both on your understandings and hearts, a lively faith; may he give you grace to retain 'the joy and confidence of hope,' founded on this faith, 'firm to the end;' may he 'fill you with all joy and peace in believing,' through God our Saviour, to whom, with God the Father, and God the Holy Ghost, be all might, majesty, dignity, and dominion, henceforward, and for evermore. Amen.

END OF VOL. II.

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